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THE FILM TO-DAY

PAUL ROTHA

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CELLULOID

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French *Tobis*

Le Million

René Clair directing René Lefébvre and Annabella

French

Tobis

LE MILLION

René Clair directing René Lefèbvre and Annabella

CELLULOID

THE FILM TO-DAY

BY

PAUL ROTHA

Founder of the Film Group

Author of " The Film till Now "

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PREFACE

This would seem to be the most fitting place in this survey to record the great loss sustained by the cinema in the recent deaths of F. W. Murnau, Lupu Pick and Edmund Meisel. All three were sincere artists who contributed much to the progress of the film, and yet their departure has received but casual mention in the English Press.

I think the name of Murnau will live longest in the mind of the student, for the films he made during the golden period of the German cinema were without exception noble pieces of craftsmanship. *Dracula, Phantom*, *The Last Laugh*, *Tartuffe* and *Faust*, produced between 1922 and 1926, supply plentiful proof of Murnau's genius for the cinema. In the Fox studios at Hollywood, whither he went with Karl Mayer, the scenarist, in 1927, he commanded the greatest respect, but we were too well acquainted with American methods of production to expect *Sunrise, The Four Devils* and *Our Daily Bread* to be anything except shadows of his German accomplishment. By the time this is being read his last film, *Tabu,* made in the Society Islands with the aid of Robert Flaherty and his own finance, will have been shown in England.

Perhaps it will carry further the aim of *The Last Laugh*—the creation of a film so perfect in visual continuity that titles or speech are unnecessary. At any rate, whatever the merits of *Tabu*, made in the open air (Murnau was essentially a studio-minded director), it is my sincere hope that the artist in Murnau will live for many years in revivals of his major works.

Lupu Pick, less known in England, is memorable for his pioneer work in the gradual transition of the German film from studio-theatricalism and macabre themes to the more naturalistic methods suggested by von Gerlach's *Vanina*. A good director, he appealed principally to the public as an actor, especially in the small but exquisitely played part of the Japanese minister in Lang's *The Spy*. Of his films, which included *The Rail, The Last Cab,* Ibsen's *Wild Duck, New Year's Eve* and the British-made *A Knight in London*, only the last three were to my knowledge shown in England, each being noted for its slow, measured development of plot and character.

The brilliant musical scores written by Edmund Meisel for *Berlin, Battleship "Potemkin," The Ten Days that Shook the World* and *The Blue Express* are known in London through the enterprise of the Film Society. It is generally acknowledged that they greatly strengthened the appeal of these already violent pieces of technique. That Meisel should be denied recognition in the future of the sound cinema, which he had largely foreseen in his expressionist "visual" music, is not to be countenanced. As will be observed at a later stage in this survey, Meisel's experimental sound-music still points the way for the perfect sound and visual film that is yet to be made.

. . . .

From reading reviews and hearing remarks occasioned by the appearance of "The Film Till Now," I gather that there seems to be some confusion as to the exact attitude I adopt towards the film. While some persons, no doubt for reasons of their own, deny me the rights of a critic, others find fault with what they like to call my "high-hat" approach to the cinema. Because I have stated my preference—in no measured terms, I admit—for a film which, for example, dramatizes an industry or a battleship to one which exploits the sex of some actress, I am branded as being "intellectual."

To me the cinema is simply a method of expression admirably suited to the needs of present-day argument. It is a means of propaganda, either in a fictional way or as a specifically designed piece of advertisement. It is a medium which offers to any creative mind a wealth of experiment in its peculiar technical devices for appealing to the human beings of this world.

In this book it will be found that this last-named aspect of the cinema—the remarkable magnetism which exists between the screen and the audience—is a source of perpetual interest to me. By analysis of every film I see, I endeavour to fathom the constitution and the strength of this appeal between a projected film and its audience. It is obvious that in this secret lies the key to entertainment, from a cultural, æsthetic and box-office point of view. And because there would seem to be some demand for literature on the subject of the cinema, I submit my observations on the film to-day to those who may care to be amused by them.

Doubtless some will take this book to be an attack on the British film industry. It is not so much that as an effort to try and persuade people in England to realize the supreme importance of the film in industry and social life as well as in entertainment. But it would pain me greatly if any of my numerous friends among the studios and administrative offices were to take offence at my remarks. Let me assure them that I am appreciative of their good intentions towards cinema, and that I know they would make the sort of films I advocate if they had their way. Everyone I meet in the film trade appears to be aiming at making good films, inasmuch that I can only assume our ideas of goodness and badness must differ extensively.

PAUL ROTHA.

July, 1931.
LONDON.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I SHOULD like to express my thanks to the various persons who have supplied me with valuable information for inclusion in this survey. My particular gratitude goes to Mr. John Grierson and Mr. Robert Flaherty for their enlightening remarks on the cinema in general, whilst I should like to record my appreciation of the many publicity departments of film companies, both in London and abroad, for the facilities kindly given.

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Most of the film strips out of which the wrapper of this book has been designed were supplied by the Empire Marketing Board, and are reproduced by courtesy of H.M. Stationery Office. The photographic work was carried out by Studio Film Laboratories.

Lastly, I take this opportunity of conveying my sincere thanks to Mr. J. R. Fawcett Thompson and to my wife for their indispensable help in proof-reading and indexing, and to my publishers for their co-operation in producing this book.

P. R.

TO BUNCH,
MY WIFE

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE FILM TO-DAY

That the scientific art of cinematography is at present not understood by many people and is, moreover, passed on one side or accepted as a vulgarity, is not perhaps of such serious consequence as would at first appear. The fact that the cinema is closely associated with commercialism, that it is indeed a great trade, will not prevent its natural course of evolution. Although side-tracked and even hampered by its money-minded sponsors, nothing will stop the film from developing along its proper path of progress. It is doubtful whether the sound film, with all its magnificent scope for enlarging the emotional appeal of the screen, would have been a practical possibility without the financial backing of the cinema industry. The nature of the medium essentially demands businesslike methods of organization and distribution on a vast scale, necessitating the co-operation and smooth inter-relationship of a large number of persons and very big sums of money.

Writers of varying calibre have tried to explain cinematography by mathematics, by psychology, by psycho-analytical observations of profound seriousness, but this has resulted in little of any real value to the man engaged in film production. And, after all, there can be no great satisfaction in restricting ourselves to a concrete, arithmetical form of cinema that is the sum conclusion of complex calculation.

Some film directors attempt to raise a skeleton of theoretical reasoning in order to justify their faults and discover a tenth dimension of the kino which provides knotty problems for the intelligentsia. It is a most admirable ambition to discard every element that is not one of the integral forces of modern cinema, but by the very nature of the medium it is an ambition to which there are many obstacles. On the other hand, it is disastrous for the mind of a cinematographer to be disordered or in a state of fluctuation between two or more ideas. Just as a director must know, or at least show pretensions of knowing, precisely what shots he wants on the studio floor, so must his outlook be clear and well-defined, like that of a Le Corbusier or a Zola. Quite often a film expresses much more than the director originally intended. Many so-called flashes of genius in the cinema are accidental, but the director or cameraman, as the case may be, is quick to turn his good fortune to advantage, either in the creation of fresh cinematic work or in the interests of showmanship according to his status.

In brief, the film industry to-day is a giant commercial organization involving something like five hundred million pounds of capital, of which four-fifths is invested in the United States of America; an industry which has grown up over night and which stretches its cumbersome bulk into every corner of the earth; an industry which attracts over two hundred and fifty million people every week within its doors; an industry hopelessly entangled with mergers and amalgamations and a complicated network of financial interests; an industry which, huge as it is in itself, is only one factor in that gigantic business of mechanical entertainment which combines the radio, the gramophone, the cinema and television.

The interests lying behind this great amusement combine are hardly those of entertainment for the multitude, whether cultural, æsthetic or educational. What passes for entertainment is in actuality propaganda, sometimes political, occasionally religious, but more often industrial or agricultural. Statistics are not happy things to thrust upon the reader at this early stage, but I would mention that it is said that the Association of Motion Picture Producers of America, under the leadership of the great panjandrum, Will Hays, reckons that every foot of American film brought into England represents one dollar's worth of American goods sold to the British public. The length of an average American feature film is eight thousand feet.

No serious student of the cinema, however, is dismayed by these rather appalling facts. No one interested in the fascination of the technique of the film is disconcerted at the mass of material presented to him or her weekly by the companies of America and England. No critic attempts to keep pace with this enormous output which we loosely term films, because so much of it is manufactured to type and so much of it is entirely worthless.

For example, I have excluded from this survey any mention of many directors working in British and American studios to-day because their films have no meaning, while they themselves exhibit no understanding of, or interest in the cinema as I accept it. They have no more pretensions to be called film directors than they have to be called plumbers or clothes-dealers, in fact rather less.

Any extensive attempt to investigate the whole field of cinema in 1931, in all its forms and ramifications—the theatrical and the non-theatrical—would be, to borrow the words of John Grierson, like an attempt to investigate the extent of the printed word. It would be mere tomfoolery to pursue the newspaper, the magazine, the novel, the verse, the drama, the pamphlet, the treatise, and the hundred other branches of the printed page, and the same applies to the pursuit of cinematic knowledge. We can but use our discrimination and search always for the source and the initial tendency.

To do so is surely one of the most absorbing forms of research, for the cinema has grown up around us within a few years. Unlike those of painting, music or the drama, the very beginnings of cinema can be examined at first-hand. We can follow it step by step at our local cinema or film society. It is part of our very existence. It has superceded the theatre in prominence in the newspapers. It is developing every day and every week. And because it started as an industry and has grown into an art, it calls for intense study and consideration. It is accessible to every one of us and it urgently needs our criticism and judgment to guide it on its way.

THE PRODUCERS AND THE PUBLIC

Within the film trade it has become an accepted fact that production-companies make every effort to supply the public with exactly the type of film it desires to see most. Producers take pride in stating that their choice of subject and acting material is governed solely by the public, and on the face of the problem it would seem logical that the public should choose its own films when it pays to see them. But in actuality this is far from being a true statement of the position.

Studio-executives do to a certain extent base their films on past experience of the box-office. That is to say, if Maurice Chevalier proves popular in a particular type of picture, the firm to whom he is under contract will continue to produce a series of similar films, trading on the success of the first. The recent plethora of crime pictures, newspaper pictures, and Westerns are cases in point. But this cannot be taken as proof that the public likes to see these kinds of stories, although the first of the series may have been universally successful. Nine times out of ten the imitations usually succeed in being failures.

That the cinemagoing public does not choose its own films cannot be over-emphasized, especially when we consider the subconscious influence exerted by the cinema on the masses. It may appear a trivial situation, but there is no question that the cultural status of the general public to-day is very largely influenced by the intellectual value of the films which it sees, or rather of the films which the producing companies make for it to see. A large number of the people who comprise the many millions of weekly attendances visits the cinema as a habit, not as the result of any particular wish to see certain players or stories. People to-day have become film-conscious, thanks to continual publicity and the accessibility of the film as an entertainment, and they are willing to accept almost any kind of programme from a comfortable seat in what are supposed to be pleasing surroundings.

It will be seen, therefore, that the position of film-producers, and in particular that of the story-selectors, is extremely responsible, for not only has the choice of theme to satisfy box-office requirements, but it should—although I admit it seldom does—aim at achieving a certain standard of intellectuality.

To believe that producers as a breed have any interest whatsoever in the cultural welfare of the public would be absurd. Many years' experience has taught us that only one factor controls a producer's schedule of pictures—that of the box-office, with certain additions in the form of incidental propaganda for the financial interests concerned. Unfortunately the only discernible common denominator of the taste of producers is vulgarity of appeal. It is impossible to deny that the theatrical side of the cinema is—taken generally—a moral, æsthetic and cultural setback to the filmgoer.

The amount of film trash which becomes effective by its monotonous repetition is amazing, and it is all the more regrettable that England is now, in proportion, the worst offender. The average British picture of to-day is far more offensive than its American *confrère*. It is an unpleasant fact, but it is recognizable that most British producers appear to have a partiality for any situation involving a bed. If you question a responsible executive in our studios as to why his films are morally unsound and their tone that of low-mindedness, he will inform you that this type of film brings in the most money.

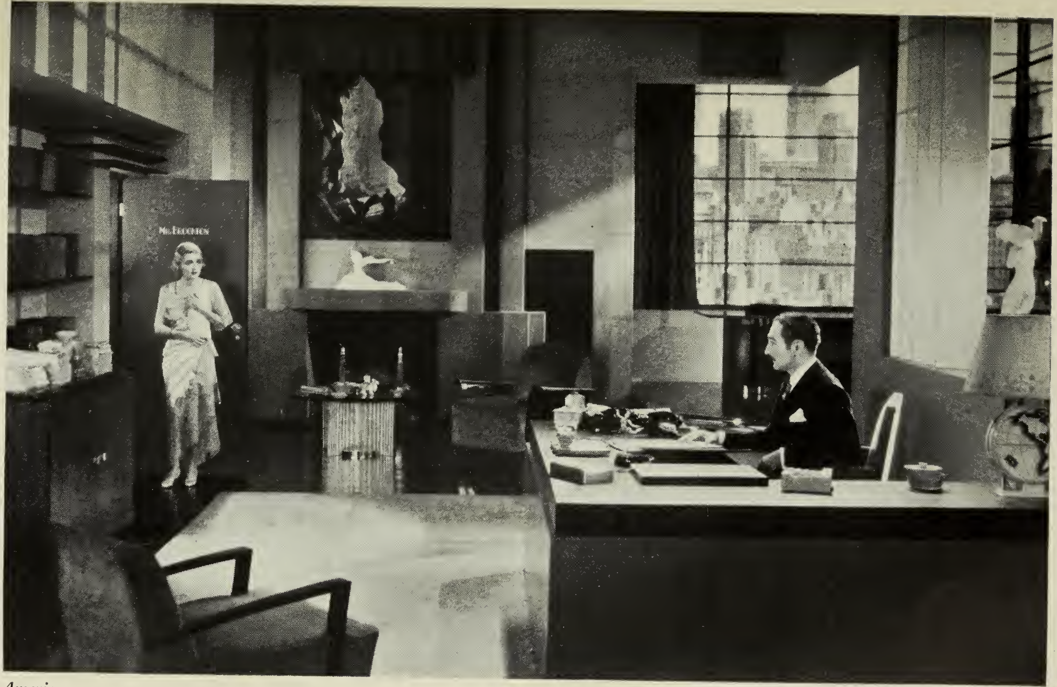
It is true, of course, that a certain section of the public will always respond when its lowest instincts are tickled, but the point is that most British producers have not tried to make any other kind of film except the vulgar. They are totally unjustified in saying that a well-made, intelligent film is not a commercial success. On many occasions I have deplored the vulgar appeal of the Hollywood film, but at least the Americans make atonement for their sins by producing a number of better quality films—a tendency that is on the increase. Pictures like *Rango, City Streets* and *The Front Page* do much to compensate for the vulgarity of the lower-class product. But England has comparatively few good quality pictures to balance against its many undressed cabarets and bedroom farces.

The only country to realize the supreme significance of this problem is, of course, Soviet Russia, where the whole industry is marshalled under one head for a definite social purpose. Germany probably takes second place, not because of any great desire on the part of its producers to elevate public taste, but because the average German is more culturally advanced than either the average Englishman or American. Although there are many film-operettas being produced on the

Continent, a German audience will have none that is not of the finest technique, like *Die Dreigroschenoper*. At the bottom of the scale, British films as a whole are made to appeal to the crudest side of human nature. An interesting sidelight on the cultural value of British films and the frankness of their producers is provided by the frequency with which recent products of our studios have incurred the disapproval of the British Board of Film Censors.

Not for a moment do I suggest that every film company should have as its aim the education of the masses. Indeed, if this policy were adopted, most film companies would be bankrupt within a year. Films must obviously be produced under economic conditions, and must as far as possible be shaped during production so as to pay their way when exhibited, but this does not necessarily signify that the meanest intelligence should control the choice of subject and the way in which it is treated. On the contrary, it is my belief that the intellectual value of a film should be slightly above the grasp of the average member of the public, for past experience in literature and the drama has proved that the public will always nibble at a standard raised a small way above its head. If such an aim were universally adopted, I am confident that a better level of general film entertainment would soon be attained, which would indirectly have considerable bearing on everyday standards of culture.

The Americans believe that a film should portray a more attractive form of living than that of the cinema audience, for the primary aim of a film as entertainment is to lift people out of their humdrum existence.



American

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

The Easiest Way

But unfortunately the Americans seek to exploit this method of appeal by an increased expenditure and not by an increased use of intelligence. Broadly speaking, Hollywood's " sophisticated " films are dressed and apartmented in greater luxury than that available to the cinema audience, but the stories enacted within these expensive surroundings are on the level of the lowest intelligence.

The whole intricate problem of the gulf existing between the producing-company and the public is one of the greatest importance, and it is with such a vitally serious matter that an endowed body like the Educational and Cultural Films Commission might occupy itself. Although at this point I am concerned principally with the theatrical side of film production —by which I mean films that rely on a fictional story-interest for their appeal to the public, and the relation of which to the whole of the cinema (abstract, educational, documentary, scientific, etc.) may be likened to that of the novel to general literature—nevertheless it will be seen at a later stage exactly how powerful is the influence of the film in all its forms on the population of the world.

If the relationship existing between the producer and the public is faced without prejudice, we shall find that the sole prerogative of the filmgoer lies in deciding whether a film appears worth paying to see. And when we come to examine this prerogative, there seems very little to make the decision easy. The average person, presumably, does not wish to spend his or her money indiscriminately at any odd box-office in the hope of seeing an interesting or entertaining film, but unless he or she happens to be particularly acquainted with current film production, what is there to assist? Descriptions in the daily Press, displays of photographs outside the cinema, and poster hoardings claiming every film to be greater than the last, which I refuse to believe the most ingenuous of filmgoers can take seriously—these are the public's chief guide to a film's respective merits.

In truth, the uninitiated filmgoer has no guarantee that a film is worth seeing before he has paid to see it. Once this is done, however, nothing else matters to the cinema in question, the man who owns it, or the company that made the film on exhibition. They have got his money and he cannot get it back. If he is in Central London, he has probably been forced to pay three shillings and sixpence and is shown into a two-shilling-and-fourpenny seat, such being the practice of some cinema exhibitors I have met. But it is dark, a picture is in progress, and he is much too self-conscious to argue. When he comes out, he grudges his money and feels a fool for having been lured inside by the attractive advertisements outside. He should not have been bullied by the commissionaire. Yet—and this is the crux of the matter—he goes again next week and the week after, simply because he has the desire to see a film and because he has not the courage to stay away. The whole game of bluff pursued by cinema exhibitors to-day is based on the human weakness that " you must see for yourself to believe."

Thus, despite such tricks as trying out new films before their première on unsuspecting audiences and giving a much publicized film a run in the provinces before bringing it to London, the big misunderstanding between the public and producers persists. The public will not stay away from bad films until after it has seen they are bad, and the producers will not learn from the success of a good film.

I am repeatedly told that what the public likes in Hoxton is not liked in Kensington, and, with certain reservations, I am prepared to believe it. In fact, I am surprised that either Hoxton or Kensington like half the films they do see. But provided a film possesses a universal quality of appeal, by which I mean that its argument has a certain contemporary significance, and provided that argument is expressed with the full simplicity demanded by good film technique, I fail to see why it should not be successful in any district or country. The ever-present proof of this is apparent in all Chaplin films. Exception, of course, must be made for subjects of localized interest. The American version of *The Front Page* is said to be incomprehensible to the average British audience, just as Dovjenko's *Zvenigora* is practically meaningless to any save a Ukrainian public. But such simple themes as Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* or Milestone's pacifist *All Quiet on the Western Front* are universally appealing, to the dock-worker or lawyer, servant-girl or head-mistress.

It is obvious, however, that the number of such universal major themes is limited, and that such simple stories as *City Lights, Birth of a Nation,* and *Sunrise* are not found on raspberry bushes. In other words, more complicated and perhaps more sophisticated stories are of necessity employed for film material, being thrust on every type of audience without discrimination. This, in my estimation, is gravely abusing the medium's main basis of appeal and can only end in disaster.

At the moment most producers are trying to make films calculated to appeal to all types of audience, which is excessively short-sighted in that they play too high for the sensation-seekers and too low for the more intelligently-minded person. Producers have not the wit to see that unless they are fortunate enough to have a simple story of universal significance, they must direct their appeal to either one or other of the different classes of public, and cut the cost of their films according to the box-office value of the public in question. When Universal make such a picture as *Resurrection,* they lavish money on its production in the hope that its expensive appearance will attract every type of film-goer, with the result that they ensnare the sensation-seekers but alienate those who have any regard for Tolstoi's story. On the other hand, *The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, which cost comparatively little to produce in comparison with most American pictures, appealed to a considerable audience. It was appreciated as a film directed with a certain amount of skill and intelligence and because it dealt with fairly credible facts and authentic pictorial material.

There can be only one solution to this problem and that is the specialist cinema movement. Whereas now the average cinema exhibitor in a large city sets out to draw every type of person into his house, in the future I believe he will concentrate on securing a certain public for a certain type of film. In turn, the producing-companies will gauge their production-schedules according to the various circuits of specialist cinemas, making sentimental slop-films at high cost for those who like them and, if we are fortunate, better and more intelligent films at a lower expenditure for the smaller specialized houses. The success of the news-reel cinemas both abroad and in London demonstrates this demand for specialized programmes; whilst the arguments in the trade for and against programmes containing only one feature film may be taken as a move in the same direction. Still further indication is found in the private film society movement which is spreading so rapidly as a protest against films presented in the ordinary way.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIALOGUE FILM

Cinematography to-day seems to be distinguished by parallel courses of development. On the one hand, there is the cinema proper, compounded from the elements of the medium, discovered and built by the Russians up till the beginning of the dialogue era; whilst on the other, there is the vast output of ordinary narrative talking films of sensational interest that occupies the capitalist studio organizations of Western Europe and America.

It will be remembered that mechanically-reproduced dialogue was brought into the sphere of commercial film activity chiefly to promote the trade of a well-known American producing-company—a company which saw in the introduction of speech into the silent cinema a novelty that might relieve the stagnant situation resulting from mass-production. Simply because a variety artist appealed to millions of filmgoers all over the world when his sobbing voice was heard in conjunction with his equally sobbing photograph on the screen, there has followed film after film of banal talking, crude acting, and situations that for bathos have never been equalled.

Probably there are many producers in the industry to-day who look back with regret to the last days of the silent cinema, when making films was a comparatively simple matter as compared with the innumerable problems of the dialogue screen. Some of them are still befuddled by the revolution that took place after Warner Brothers met with success when they produced their first big talking film. But if we recollect, in the year preceding the onrush of the one-hundred-per-cent. speech movies, the silent cinema was labouring under bad storms and was rapidly losing its carefully collected public. The monotony of the star-system, the shortage of stories and the standardization of product had greatly wearied the filmgoing public, and the appeal of the cinema had to be bolstered up with variety turns and orchestral interludes, as well as by the erection of vast palaces of luxury and atrocious vulgarity. In the winter of 1928 there were few films that stood alone on their merits as films. The vast majority succeeded only after extensive publicity and expensive première presentations.

However much we may deplore the coming of the dialogue cinema, with its hampering speeches and stage " acting," we must admit that it had one great merit inasmuch as fresh ideas and new personalities found their way into the studios. It was as if a stimulating wind blew through the exhausted, leaden atmosphere of the film factories.

For some time the response of the public, eager to see and hear this new wonder, remained steady, and the producers were content to make any film so long as it spoke loudly. They congratulated themselves on having backed this new method of appeal, becoming so occupied with speech and sound in their most obvious forms that practically no experiment other than the perfecting of the technical apparatus took place in this new medium.

It is a matter of common observation to appreciate that since talking films have occupied the attention of the studios, the pictorial value of the screen has greatly deteriorated. Directors and cameramen have been so absorbed in arranging and recording the speech of their players that they have neglected the all-important considerations of camera angle and composition. The films of the last year of the silent period were far more pleasing from a pictorial point of view than most of the films to-day.

As was only to be expected, this period of craving for hearing speech soon began to fade, and despite the enormous expense to which the producers had been put by installing sound systems and rebuilding their studios, they found themselves confronted once again with the problem of discovering a still more stimulating method of novelty appeal. Plentiful evidence existed last year and exists to-day that the filmgoing public has tired of its craze for simply hearing speech and seeing moving pictures of the speakers. No longer do we experience a thrill of delight when a whisky-and-soda is mixed to the accompaniment of the Niagara Falls. Audiences have become sound-conscious and the cutting of sound is not without appeal to their imagination.

The first new sensation to which producers turned their attention was their old friend the colour film. They believed—though how they could have been so short-sighted it is difficult to understand—that a widespread use of colour would solve their problems. Accordingly they experimented with the public's taste for blue and yellow and green and red. But unfortunately this riot of colour, smothered over *Whoopees* and bits of *Hell's Angels*, met with an apathetic reception from an already jaded public. The latter displayed no particular interest in colour films as such, and where successes were made they were not substantial enough to warrant the increased expenditure.

I have explained at length in " The Film Till Now " why colour is unnecessary in the dramatic theatrical film and how it definitely diminishes appeal. These reasons, I think, make clear to a large extent why the public was unresponsive, why colour must always remain a speculation from a commercial point of view, and how for æsthetic reasons colour is a white elephant to the cinematic medium. In any case, how is one to cut in terms of colour? Only on the rarest occasions and then purely for a decorative purpose, such as in posters, cartoon and abstract films, can I visualize colour in the cinema.

American *Paramount*

TABU

The dramatic contrasts of monochrome are inherent in the film's attack on our emotions. In my experience, all the colour that the cinema may need is obtainable by the use of panchromatic stock. Realistic colour in its limited forms as we see it in films to-day is quite without use to a creative director. It is not accurate realism of colour which is desirable but the ability to be able to suggest colour. Such films as *Finis Terræ* and *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* were filled with suggestive colour although they were actually photographed in tones of black and white.

Of particular interest in this connection is Flaherty's *Moana*, the first film to be photographed in its entirety on panchromatic stock. After making many experiments at all times of the day, Flaherty found that if he did all his shooting before ten o'clock in the morning and between four and half-past six in the evening, the low angle of the sun produced not only a wonderful stereoscopic effect but suggested a broad range of greens and browns on the screen. By being photographed in this way, *Moana* possessed a beautiful golden quality as if the whole landscape had been drenched in sun, while the trees and figures stood out in amazing relief. No further device for obtaining colour reproduction could have been desired. Some director might well attempt a similar idea in England by shooting an entire film in a half-light and perhaps achieve a typically British effect of greyness in this way.

At the moment, the wide screen and the promise of stereoscopic effect are being put forward rather gingerly as attractions. As with the other sensations, the first wide films met with a short enthusiasm in America.

Only one presentation has been made in England, that of *The Bat Whispers,* which seemed a singularly ill-chosen subject to exploit what merit the greater screen-area might possess. Opinions vary, also, as to what proportions the new screen should assume. Its commercial sponsors have been content with retaining approximately the old proportions but extending them at the top and sides. But the prolific pen of Eisenstein has presented an essay in favour of a square screen, producing a wealth of tradition in support of his argument for the necessity of the vertical as well as the horizontal in pictorial composition. Perhaps the most powerful point in his favour is his list of things that have been denied adequate representation on the screen —" the Paramount Building in New York, Primo Carnera, or the profound and abysmal *cañons* on Wall Street in all their expressiveness—yet exiled for thirty years from the screen."

At all events, it seems as if the wide screen will not arrive on a general scale for some length of time, since the trade has not yet overcome the great expense caused by the dialogue cinema, and the adoption of the wide screen would necessitate drastic alteration in many recently erected cinemas. In all probability the wide screen will be dropped for a while and brought forward again when experiment shall have justified its advantage to the already existing attributes of the medium. I think it likely that more attention will be given to the actual movement of the screen itself rather than to its enlargement to a fixed area. The use of the expanding screen at the same time as a tracking shot is projected on to the screen's surface produced remarkable effects at the London presentation of *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Conversely, the contraction of the screen-area for lending emphasis is capable of interesting results, already suggested in the use of iris-in and iris-out movements employed just after the War.

When at last the showmen are nonplussed because their box-of-tricks is exhausted, then perhaps the cinema will have an opportunity to come into its own. To a large extent it is because the medium is so prolific in the variety of its technical devices that films to-day seldom achieve a state of unified composition. There are few directors who have a complete mastery over their medium, who employ the many technical attributes of the cinema to gain the right effect at the right moment. Milestone is one. Clair and Pabst are two others. Only Grierson in England has an appreciation of his instruments. But this is apart from the argument of appeal that occupies the producers day in and day out. They are not concerned with the limits or scope of their medium. They will issue instructions for any new effect or sensation to be used if they think that public interest can be retained in this way. In the film studio, whether in America, England, Germany or France, it is the box-office—or at least the producer's idea of box-office—that controls the technique of the film.

Statistics show that cinema audiences in 1930 failed to maintain the big business created by the great talking boom of 1929. Figures reveal that attendances have dropped to the average levels of the pre-dialogue period. The winter season of 1930-31 showed that box-office receipts in England had fallen by an average of thirty per cent. in comparison with those of the same season of the year before. It is more evident than ever that the dialogue cinema has reached the zenith of its appeal. The position is one of inertia both in the trade and in the public and something fresh must be found to sustain the profits of the movie-makers.

THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSAL APPEAL

The extreme difficulties presented by the necessity of universal appeal to meet exorbitant costs of production have been greatly augmented by the introduction of speech into the cinema. If there is one problem more than another which by its urgency occupies the minds of producers in Europe and America to-day, without doubt it is that of the limited appeal of the dialogue film.

Apart from technical matters, the primary quality of a good film should be the universal meaning of its theme. The great work of art, the symphony or the painting, appeals with equal force to any person irrespective of his or her nationality. That factor was the whole basis of the silent cinema. Its universal appeal made it a great industry. Chaplin was as well-known in Poland as in Penzance. But the self-imposed language barrier of the speech film fells at one sweep this integral quality of the cinema. Whatever we may argue against dialogue in the cinema, however much we may appreciate that it has brought the best plays to the screen, the fact remains that literary speech strikes a fatal blow straight at the heart of the cinema.

Widespread attempts have been made to produce multilingual films at large cost but with singularly unfortunate results. In America the problem has been tackled in various ways. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Fox have tried importing players and making German and Spanish versions of their more successful pictures. But most of these films have not been productive of very encouraging results, especially in the South American market, where the speech was violently resented. Paramount, on the other hand, have carried production into the camp of the enemy by opening up huge studios for making foreign versions at Joinville, near Paris. There, directors are engaged to patch together American pictures and French post-synchronized voices, with the result that intelligent Frenchmen look askance at the result. Recently, the Americans have relaxed their efforts to supply the foreign market and have been content with meeting only the demand of the English-speaking peoples. But even this restricted market is in a state of constant fluctuation and many American talking films have been lamentable failures in England.

In Europe, both France and Germany are making a big drive in production in their native languages, and considerable co-operation has sprung up between the two countries. Ufa recently announced a large production-schedule of trilingual super films, including American versions for which it has secured a small circuit of theatres in the States. The Tobis company, also, has lately been buying a series of cinemas in America. Bold projects, these, which are not without their humorous aspects. Italy, Sweden and Czechoslovakia are all producing speech films in their respective languages, thus gradually diminishing the American influence which was so strong in pre-dialogue days. Britain has also been well to the fore in multilingual production and a feature of British International's policy is films in three languages.

The result of this competition should be of great interest. On the one side, America has years of production-experience on a highly commercial basis and vast resources at its command, whilst Europe has imagination for its principal asset, as such films as *Zwei Herzen im $\frac{3}{4}$—Takt* and *Train de Suicidés* more than evidence. Yet again there are such films as Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris* which has run very successfully in Berlin, Paris, London and New York in its original French version, thus proving that it is the treatment and theme which must be universal and that the language in which the film is recorded is of little consequence. Why, then, pursue the policy of speech when it is sound that is of primary importance?

Indeed there is every indication that even if speech is not disappearing entirely from the theatrical film, at any rate its use in the future will be greatly curbed in comparison with the babel of voices heard during last year. Hollywood, I understand, is now working to a schedule of twenty-five per cent. speech and seventy-five per cent. pictorial value for its more sophisticated films, and what Hollywood does this year Elstree will do next. The recent presentation in London and New York of René Clair's films, in which speech has been reduced to a minimum and continuity music is used

French *Tobis*

Sous Les Toits de Paris

throughout, will have definite influence on the situation. The significance of Chaplin's *City Lights* in this respect will be dealt with at a later stage, but it may be said now that Chaplin is a shrewd showman to produce what is ostensibly a silent film in the midst of an army of dialogue pictures.

Not for a moment, however, do I suggest that the silent film will ever return to public favour. The great achievements of the silent cinema will in all probability continue to be shown at specialist repertory cinemas, as indeed they deserve to be for the benefit of rising generations; but contemporary production will be completely concerned with the conjunction of sound and image in a new form of film that will possess universal appeal. As far as I am aware, no material example of this type of sound film exists to-day. There has not yet been made a film in terms of sound and visual images without the interruption of speech. The nearest approach, perhaps, lies in some synchronized versions of silent films, such as *The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, but these have not included naturally recorded sound interwoven with the musical score.

Every month brings a new and more stimulating Disney sound cartoon to the cinema and still, after all this time, no director or producer has learned the obvious lesson from these superb masterpieces of sound and visual rhythm. Such a magnificent example of what lies to be achieved in the sound medium as *The Skeleton Dance* passes by unheeded. We hear the chariot race in the synchronized version of *Ben-Hur*, the machine-guns in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the aeroplanes in *Hell's Angels*, the accordion in *Sous* *les toits de Paris*, the footsteps in *The Virginian*, the drum-beats in *The King of Jazz*, and yet we are incapable of perceiving the superiority of sound over speech.

In view of this, I put forward the belief that the cinema as a whole, in all its magnificent bigness, is not progressing. That, with the exception of one or two sound experiments, the cinema has failed to justify its real existence as a medium of expression fit for the twentieth century since the enforced introduction of speech three years ago. In such matters as story-value and the general perfection of the technical attributes of the medium (such as moving camerawork and noiseless sound reproduction) I do not deny that advances have been made. As a means of education, also, the documentary and cultural film has been partially developed. But broadly speaking, the cinema as an instrument capable of affecting the minds of the masses throughout the world has failed not only to add the full advantages of sound to its power of expression, but has practically reached a state of stagnation through its crazy pursuit of speech.

STORY SHORTAGE CRISIS

Yet a further problem of the gravest significance with which the producers are faced to-day is the apparent lack of fresh film stories. The extreme seriousness of this coming crisis cannot be over-stated. On the surface, it may perhaps seem foolish to say that the supply of suitable stories for screen purposes is drying up, but a short analysis of current films will show this to be the truth. Any honest film man will tell you that it becomes increasingly difficult to find fresh subjects—suitable, that is, for well-known film stars and of sufficient universal interest to be commercial speculations.

There was a scarcity of good stories when silent films were at the peak of their success and a crisis was imminent. Even then there was a noticeable similarity between all film stories. Fortunately for the producers and scenario-editors, however, the talking film arrived and instantly unloosed the flood-gates of the theatre. With the coming of speech, a wild stampede—like the opening of *Cimarron*—was made by the producers of both Continents to secure the film rights of well-known plays which, with their ready-made dialogue and in some cases successful stage runs, made sure-fire propositions for immediate production activity.

But the supply was only limited. The theatre itself is short of fresh material. And as the acquisition of stage plays continued, the available stock inevitably became exhausted, until now hardly any play with pretensions to the name remains unread or unpurchased for film purposes. Much the same state of affairs applies to novels. Practically any best-seller is immediately bought and sometimes the fortunate—at least we may think he is fortunate—author is placed under contract by which all the rights of his future books are secured. Scenario-departments in England and America are kept busy reading every novel upon which they can lay their hands, but few of these contain any new ideas for film story-material. Not only this, but story competition in America has become so keen that practically any suitable novel is bought before publication, or in the case of a play before it has been produced. Every attempt is made to obtain galley-proofs of novels from agents and the rights are often secured after the first few thousand words have been read.

An unmistakable indication of this dearth of story-material is found in the number of subjects which are being remade with new titles, fresh casts and younger directors, all variations on the age-old themes of love and passion and the other man's wife. One by one all the old favourites are reappearing with new faces, and in every case the talking version is less effective than the silent original. Three good examples of this re-dressing of old wares are *Moby Dick, Three Faces East* and *Resurrection*, none of the present versions containing one-tenth of the force of their mute ancestors. Added to which, numerous old films are being re-issued with synchronized accompaniments and ingenious sound effects. Once again we have *Ben-Hur* and *The Birth of a Nation* amongst us. All this goes to prove how hard up is Hollywood for story-material and how short-sighted is its search.

In England, scenario-departments appear to rely almost entirely on the stage for their story-supply, probably because the manner in which British scenarios are written so closely resembles that of plays that two birds are killed with one expenditure each time a fresh play is purchased. The shortage in England is so great that our clever scenario-editors are delving into the Victorian melodramas in the vain hope of discovering something original.

Within recent months America has come to rely to a great extent on everyday news items for its ideas, and attempts are made to keep in touch with the public's interest for topical events. Quite a large percentage of story-films produced in Hollywood this year has been based on actual happenings, or their love-plots have been set in environments that have been good news-value at the moment. Thus, there are *The Front Page*, *Scandal Sheet* and *Dance, Fools, Dance* in the newspaper world; *Little Cæsar*, *The Public Enemy* and *The Silent Six* in the gangster vein; *Dirigible*, *Young Eagles* and *The Lost Zeppelin* set in the air; all more or less inspired by real events.

The idea of thus utilizing contemporary incidents and vogues of interest is, I think, good and it certainly agrees with the obligation of the cinema to be a reflector of everyday life. The only trouble is that America cannot be trusted to let such material rely on its own merit, but must of necessity break it up with the same old formulated romance of thwarted passion. Film after film of excellent natural real-life material is debased by its boy-and-girl romantic interest. There is also an unfortunate tendency to repeat good ideas, and there are many recent instances of a successful picture being rapidly followed by a host of poor imitations.

When we come to examine the position closely it will be found that this bankruptcy of the story-market is caused by the fact that very few stories are written especially for the screen. There are practically no writers to-day who devote their whole time to writing in terms of the film medium, with the exception of various hack-scenarists who wearily turn out the same story times without number.

Although Mr. Goldwyn dispatched Messrs. Michael Arlen and Walter Hackett to Hollywood in furtherance of his policy of engaging eminent authors to write original screen stories on a royalty basis, on the same terms as are customary with stage plays, the fact remains that it has been proved repeatedly that celebrated authors do not possess the rudimentary knowledge of the cinema necessary to the creation of good film stories. The visit of the late William J. Locke to Hollywood and the dialogue recently written for a film by Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, are two cases in point. Mr. Lonsdale's special story for Ronald Colman, *The Devil to Pay*, was good entertainment but it might well have been a play. And after all, how can these writers, who are admirable at their own tasks, be intimately acquainted with the conditions that govern cinema as a means of expression? I would suggest that producers are not so much interested in the plots that their eminent authors write as they are in the weight of their illustrious names.

There are two possible solutions to this problem of story-shortage, both of which have been obvious for some years but neither of which has been adopted. Firstly, while this panic for discovering new angles on the old literary complex occupies the film industry, the camera and the microphone have still to explore the world outside the studios. Producers have only just begun to realize the enormous wealth of natural material that exists beyond the studio floors, and they have even yet to be persuaded that the public is clamouring to see it.

Never has the demand for out-of-doors films been so strong as it is to-day, but still producers will not recognize that the artificiality of their expensive studios has lost its grip on the public's purse. In Hollywood there is some return to the old Western manifested in such films as *Billie the Kid, Cimarron* and *Fighting Caravans*, but there is still too much trust placed in studio settings intermingled with real material. Paramount have made a determined attempt to break away into *plein-air* pictures, but they have still retained their studio-mind. They made a good picture of *The Virginian*, but that they do not fully comprehend the potentialities of the Western is apparent from such repetitions as *Gun Smoke*, *The Conquering Horde* and *Light of the Western Stars*. These Westerns of Paramount manufacture depend too greatly on the appeal of Gary Cooper, Richard Arlen, Fay Wray or Lili Damita, and refuse to allow the desert and the horses and the trees to become the centre of interest. These are out-of-doors pictures made with the artificiality of a studio-mind.

Sooner or later the production-executives must come to realize that the gallery of stars and the sets from the property-rooms will have to be left behind, because the artificial and the real will not mix. The Americans have yet to learn how to represent cinematically their enormous wealth of natural resources. In England, we are terrified to leave our precious Elstree palaces and get to grips with the real heart of England. No

British director except Grierson has yet appreciated how much England has to give to the screen, or has the toughness or the conviction of his principles to make an out-of-doors picture.

There will be those of the film trade who will argue that the public does not wish to be entertained by anything except human dramas and slop sentimentality, sophisticated bed-passion and revue choruses. If this is so, it is curious that so many out-of-doors films have been great successes, and that *Chang* still charms its audiences. Personally, I attach tremendous significance to the widespread popularity of the German mountain film, *The White Hell of Pitz Palu,* largely because in many districts filmgoers wrote to their local cinemas asking for the film to be shown, in some cases demanding a revival. I refer, of course, to the original synchronized version and not to the Universal " all-talking " copy that was put on the market later.

If the producers ask why the public preferred this simply-made film to the newest four-hundred-thousand-pounds extravaganza in colour, I can willingly tell them—because *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* fulfilled some of the elementary duties of the proper cinema which the four-hundred-thousand-pounds extravaganza in colour did not—because it showed mountains and snow and people far from the muck and artificiality of the studios—because the public did not know the actors by name—because for once they were able to forget Elstree and Hollywood ever existed—they forgot the horrors of the star-system and of faked scenery. And after many months of bleating speech they were shown again that a film could be clean, healthy,

German *Aafa*

Storm over Mont Blanc

vigorous stuff. *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* was exemplary of good cinema, as opposed to the falseness of the talking film, and it was received with open arms.

It is this obligation of the cinema to present reality in its proper surroundings—without mock-heroism and faked scenery—to present truth without distortion or exaggeration, but in such a manner that it will both entertain and interest, that the film producers ignore to-day. If the cinema is to prosper and continue to live as an industry, it is essential that material be given precedence over acting values and settings. This presentation of real people and real environments is the heart of the cinema. It is the life and blood of good film-making, and the sooner the moneyed sponsors of the trade realize it, the better the cinema will become. The merits of such a film as Schoedsack's *Rango,* not good in the sense that *Moana* and *Finis Terræ* were good, but still commendable, will reveal to any common-sense person how the actual material of this world can smash once and for all the trembling structure of the star-system and sophisticated sex-plots.

Every country in the five continents contains admirable material for the making of films, waiting for visual and sound treatment by the minds of creative directors. Practically nothing of any cinematic value has as yet been done with Africa, although there is inspiration enough in its peoples and customs for a thousand films. The great treks in the South, the magnificence of the Zulus, and the traditions of the Nile are but three rich sources of material. India is brimming over with landscape, architecture and legends which would provide the basis for a multitude of dramatic pictures. Lapland, the Indies and the Amazon, these are but names to the average audience of Europe and America. But I do not suggest that such films should be made in the jocular style of *Trader Horn* or *Africa Speaks*. They must be produced by directors who have dramatic as well as cinematic instinct, who possess a thorough knowledge of their subject, and treated as deeply-rooted themes and expressed in terms of fluid images and overtones of sound. Their style has already been foreshadowed in the work of Robert Flaherty and such films as *Finis Terræ* and *Storm Over Asia.*

It would be the sanest thing in the sordid history of the cinema if every studio were to close down for the period of a year, if all the stars were given a vacation, and if production units (complete with cameras and recording apparatus) were to be sent to every part of the world. The resulting films would be the most thrilling entertainment that has ever been produced.

There is just a possibility, remote but not improbable, that the present scarcity of stories for theatrical films may force the producers to recognize the many other available aspects of the cinema, resulting in an increased production of documentary, non-fictional films. With the exception of a few isolated examples, such as the beautiful *Moana* and the memorable *Nanook of the North*, the late Fred Murnau's *Tabu*, and such semi-interest films as *The Iron Horse, White Shadows in the South Seas* and *Trader Horn*, the American cinema has not to any great extent entered the field of non-theatrical production. But with the success, it is hoped, of *Rango* and the past successes of *The White*

Hell of Pitz Palu and *Chang*, perhaps the Americans in their search for material will explore the wealthy fields of the natural resource cinema.

On the other hand, if it is necessary to continue with the manufacture of the filmed novel, then the solution to the story problem lies in the systematic training of writers for the screen—writers who shall be given the opportunity to understand the full range of their medium. By this, I do not mean the employment of already-established playwrights who are accustomed to the theatre, but the training of new young writers who from the outset will create in terms of cinema and who will have no interest in the novel and the play.

In the studios to-day there are as yet too few people engaged in making films who can think and work cinematically—who are, if I may be allowed the expression, film-conscious. The film studio is still very largely the refuse dump for men and women who have failed to make good in other surroundings. The cinema is so young that it has not yet had the time to breed men and women who are devoted to its interests. Practically no film technicians have come to the cinema direct. They have become absorbed into film work through the stage or some other medium, and have not yet shaken its clogging dust from their feet. There is no training school of cinematography in England and there is as yet no place where the history of the cinema can be studied. In the film world there is but a handful of persons who can create in cinema as writers can in literature and artists in painting.

THE AMERICAN FILM

True to its tradition, Hollywood is as undecided in its outlook to-day as it was during the zenith of the silent cinema. A brief inspection of the American films showing in London within the last two years reveals with startling clarity how great a state of chaos prevails in the minds of American producers. It is quite true to say that the American cinema is heading in a dozen different directions at the same time and is getting nowhere because of it. Such stupendous spectacles as *The King of Jazz, Hell's Angels, The Big Trail* and *Trader Horn* demonstrate the unbalanced conditions that govern production and show that tendencies towards both subject-matter and technique are one thing one day and another the next.

The magnitude of such films as I have just mentioned hardly suggests surety of purpose. On the contrary, lavish spectacle and extravagant production are being used to gloss over technical and æsthetic uncertainty. With reckless abandon, eight hundred thousand pounds are spent on *Hell's Angels,* a film which at the maximum contained one thousand feet of exciting aeroplane acrobatics; whereas the same producer finances Milestone to make *The Front Page* at the cost of approximately forty thousand pounds, or about one-twentieth of the cost of *Hell's Angels*, and produces an exceptionally brilliant film. This instance of relative expenditure and merit is to me typical of the capitalist attitude of Hollywood towards film making.

Yet despite their absurd inconsistencies which make any sensible person reel in amazement, we cannot help but admit that the Americans do try to make good films. This last year has seen some particularly interesting if not brilliant productions emanating from Hollywood studios. Within his own limits of cinematic sense, the American producer does his best to employ good talent.

One of the outstanding reasons for the difference between the technical quality of American pictures and that of the British product can be explained by one word—highbrowism. In Hollywood, they at least attempt to make films as well as their ability allows them. They are not afraid of experiment, so long as it will ultimately appeal to the general public. They have little patience with those distorted cognoscenti whose art consists of homosexuality and slaughter-houses, but they will try to lure Clair to America and put Sergei Eisenstein under contract. Having chosen a suitable story from the box-office point of view, they put their best talent into expressing it on the screen, even though that best often falls short of the standards we demand.

The American director has one admirable merit—he never stops to think if he is being too clever. Milestone's cutting in *The Front Page* is as good as anything that has been done in the Russian cinema, yet it is not considered advanced. The word " highbrow " is unknown in Hollywood. Examine three recent pictures, *Quick Millions*, *Cimarron* and *Dishonoured*. Each of them is well photographed, well designed, and very capably directed. None of them is a brilliant film, but they are one-hundred-per-cent. efficient. A great deal of cleverness has gone to their making. They are definitely sophisticated in their appeal because the Americans are no longer making films for the " hick " mind. This is largely because the small cinemas of the United States are rapidly disappearing and their patrons are going to the larger towns which boast a super-house equipped with sound. Consequently, the " intellectual " value of stories has slightly improved with the development of the talking films, and generally speaking direction to-day is more subtle and refined than it was a few years back.

But in England we are for ever stopping to consider if we are being too highbrow. Our studio-executives attempt to play down to a hypothetical and totally false idea of the public's intelligence. In actuality, the public is far too intelligent to be satisfied with the undressed immaturity of British films. It is accustomed to the smooth polish and high mechanical efficiency of the American cinema and dislikes the ingenuousness of most of the British product.

Despite their superiority, however, American producers have themselves reached the point where they do not know what to do next. As I have explained earlier, they are at their wit's end to find a new angle on the cinema public. Such divergent productions as *Abraham Lincoln*, *Animal Crackers* and *Morocco* are shots at random to test the public's reactions. Shortly, perhaps, producers will realize that they would do well to listen to the theorists of experience, who know a great deal more about the appeal of the cinema to the public than the producers, the latter being concerned almost solely with the business aspect of the industry. It would probably profit a big company far more to employ one single film adviser thoroughly acquainted with the medium than all the well-known authors in the world. But that is exactly what the moneyed movie-makers will not do. They have their biographies written instead.

It is interesting to note quite what effect the dialogue film has had on the Hollywood mentality, for although speech has in many ways been a hindrance to film progress, it cannot be denied that in quality of subject-matter the American movie, on the whole, has somewhat improved. The employment of stage plays written by more or less intelligent authors has necessarily raised the intellectual value of the American cinema slightly above that obtaining during the silent period, often with humorous results. I have experienced at first regret and then amusement watching the Hollywood executives misfire their mental rockets over the wit and satire of the Lonsdale and Somerset Maugham plays—plays which obviously call for more skill of handling (not film direction but intelligent treatment) than that possessed by most of the American film directors. *The High Road* and *Strictly Unconventional* both convey my point, which may be still further emphasized by citing the film version of *Anna Christie*.

On the other hand, the adaptation of good stage plays to the screen has brought into the studios a number of brilliant actors and actresses whose work and personalities have given much to the cinema. In some cases the extreme accomplishment of the acting has taken the control out of the director's hands, with the result that a film has relied for its success solely upon the skill of the acting personnel. It is, in fact, a repetition of the situation which came about in the early years of the German film, when the powerful and traditional acting of such players as Emil Jannings, Werner Krauss, Fritz Körtner, Paul Wegener and Conrad Veidt overcame the somewhat inexperienced direction of that time. To-day in America, much the same sort of thing is taking place. The consummate skill of such players as Ruth Chatterton, Walter Huston, George Arliss, William Powell, Jack Holt and Paul Lukas has rendered their films of great personal appeal, the direction being quite impersonal and mechanical. Such a hardened observer as myself failed to distinguish any characteristic of direction in *The Subway Express, Manslaughter, The Tarnished Lady*, *Holiday* or *The Criminal Code.* I do not know who directed any of these pictures, but I was impressed by the personality of their respective players.

This conforms with the only outstanding tendency of the American cinema to-day—the gradual disappearance of the individual touch in the striving after standardization. I would point out that this is the selfsame standardization which brought about the deadlock in the silent cinema three years ago, and which again faces the Hollywood executive-committees.

At the risk of redundancy, I would repeat that the making of films is passing more and more into the hands of the men with the greatest financial resources. Money means control, and control means the setting-up of production-committees to examine every film as it proceeds from stage to stage before, during, and after production. As anyone in the film trade will admit, it is one chance to a hundred that a good film, as we know a good film, will come unharmed through this process of production according to recipe. This system of committee-made pictures is gradually achieving a stranglehold on the freedom of the medium and is narrowing the opportunities of the individualist. A director is limited to making one type of picture and that entirely according to the rules laid down by the production-committee. Very few directors can stand out against this dominance and still invest their work with personal feeling.

Chaplin is an independent producer and can therefore remain aloof. Stroheim is very often out of work. Vidor has failed to maintain his early promise. Sternberg loses initiative in Hollywood but is interesting (with Pommer) in Germany. Feyder has achieved nothing in America. George Hill might realize something big if allowed the freedom. Milestone laboured under difficulties with Universal and secured liberty with Howard Hughes. As far as I am aware, Lubitsch is the only director to retain his personal touch under executive supervision. He has risen to unprecedented heights with the introduction of sound, and has been in his element when making *Monte Carlo* and *The Love Parade*. For the rest, they have become subservient to the tyranny of the executive-committees.

Not a great deal of skill is necessary in order to perceive that Hollywood to-day is in a far from enviable position. Until the coming of speech, America never worried greatly over the high expenditure on its pictures; in the long run the box-office usually made its way whatever the costs of production. But since the first novelty of the talking film has worn off, audiences have gradually decreased and still continue to decrease. With the shortage of story-material on the one side and the higher level of " sophistication " on the other, the output from America has necessarily decreased in quantity. Yet there are still the same number of cinemas, if not more, to supply with programmes. In the meantime, the cost of production has soared higher in the pursuit of spectacular appeal, while the opportunities for large profit have been restricted on account of the limitations of speech. The truth is that the production of every film to-day is a speculation; whereas in the silent days of universal appeal it was generally a certainty. Moreover, in this financial war of controlling interests, many of the old showmen who have been connected with the business for years are being shouldered out. I shall not be surprised if within a few years scarcely any of the old-time producers are left in the film trade.

Most American film companies are at the moment on an unstable footing. Yet in their accustomed way, big schedules are announced for 1931-32 productions. At the time of writing, vigorous economic reorganization is being recommended in Hollywood despite the fact that overhead expenses (by reason of precedent) and production costs cannot be lowered. It is ironical that in spite of the indifferent quality of the British output, our companies in England are more financially secure than those of America.

THE BRITISH FILM

What I have written of America largely holds good with England, save that it applies on a much smaller scale to our limited output and our small-minded executives. There is no question, of course, that the coming of the talking film greatly helped the British film industry as a whole to gain some position of moderate stability, and that British films to-day are, generally speaking, slightly better in quality and more plentiful than they were in the pre-dialogue period. On the other hand, I and many with me wholly disagree with the way in which films are produced in England, not only as regards subject-matter but with the whole attitude of the average British film man towards the cinema. I object to imitative methods; I differ from the British executives' idea of what constitutes box-office appeal; and I abhor bad and incompetent workmanship in such a great medium as the cinema.

The general mismanagement of British studios and their complete failure to understand what the cinema means to the everyday person is capable of quite simple explanation. Immediately after the War, the film industry in this country was comprised almost solely of renting and distributing firms for handling foreign, chiefly American, pictures. There was little attempt at actual production, partly because of lack of money and partly because of inexperience. The men who entered the film trade then came either as newcomers or were returning to their old calling. At any rate, it is more or less true to say that few of them joined the film industry because they were particularly interested in films. Most of them were glad to get a job which was comparatively straightforward, well-paid, and required a minimum of intellectual effort. Most of them had positively no idea of creative ability or what it might mean, and absolutely no judgment of entertainment. Their sole asset was a flair for copying and America was the obvious pattern in front of their eyes.

Those men, once commercial travellers and showmen, now occupy positions of considerable authority in the studio side of the industry. It is in their power to employ the talent out of which British films are made; but it is a matter of common knowledge that they have not the ability to do so. It has never been their job. For the most part, these men who compose our studio-executives, aping the American methods of control, are unable to distinguish a good film from a bad one. The conditions under which the majority of British films are produced to-day are intolerable to any serious-minded person. Still more important, no individual with the sort of intelligence and energy so urgently wanted in the film trade will now accept a post in the British film industry. Instead they are turning elsewhere: the actors and actresses to America, the technicians to the Continent. Why was the first offer of the Dunning Process[1] turned down and its

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[1] A trick photographic device by means of which shots taken separately of two different scenes may be so blended together as to defy detection except by an expert eye. Instances may be observed in the street scenes of *Unfaithful* and *The Street of Chance*, the motor-boat chase in *Min and Bill*, and the more "daring" scenes in *Trader Horn*.

English inventor allowed to go to Hollywood, where he has made a fortune for himself and caused a revolution in production methods?

It will at once be said that this type of production mind is no different from that governing the American industry. But this is not so. The American executives may be crude and possibly vulgar, but they have at least this merit—they possess the faculty for employing talent and are not afraid of doing so. Men like Samuel Goldwyn and Carl Laemmle probably know little about actual details of production work, but they have the intelligence to engage people who know something about films, and they will pay them adequately for their knowledge. That is precisely what the British producer will not do.

I am not saying that good films will never be made in England. They *can* and *will* be made—but not until a drastic reorganization has taken place. I plead for a clean sweep of the production-executives in British studios, and ask that all the pettifogging supervisors shall be replaced by men and women who are willing to think and work in terms of motion pictures as well as for their personal gain. This is at heart our chief trouble—our producers, directors and scenario-editors cannot visualize as the Americans can from an entertainment point of view.

Disgusted with the attitude of the British theatrical studios, young men in England whose interests lie in the field of the cinema have turned elsewhere for support. They are utilizing their ideas in the production of propaganda films for various concerns, where they are free to pursue their own theories of advanced technique in sound and cutting. In these short propaganda pictures there can be seen the nucleus of the true British film, a new and powerful form of cinema, being developed by men who have received but little encouragement for their brains in British studios.

PROPAGANDA AND THE CINEMA

In one form or another, directly or indirectly, all films are propagandist, negative or positive, for their place of origin. Whether it is aware of the propaganda or not, the general public is influenced by every film which it sees. Under the thin veil of entertainment, the hard fact is apparent that the film is the most influential medium yet discovered for persuading an audience to believe this or to do that. The dual physio-psychological appeal of pictorial movement and sound is so strong that if made with imagination and skill, a film can stir the emotions of any audience.

The significant part played by propaganda in the development of cinematography is quite remarkable. On reflection, it will be agreed that the potentialities of the cinematic medium for propaganda have been mainly instrumental in bringing about some of the most interesting achievements in film technique both sound and silent, during the last decade. I firmly believe that the next great advance in world-cinema is likely to result from the use of the film in its non-fictional, propagandist branches. It would certainly appear that a better understanding of the elements of film construction seems to be reached by cinematographers whose theme or dramatic content is supplied to them, than by those directors who seek merely to provide ephemeral entertainment from literary stories.

In the American cinema, such notable films as *The Big Parade* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, both marking definite progress from a technical point of view, were at heart propagandist in aim. It is well to recall also that Flaherty's first film *Nanook of the North* was sponsored by a fur company as incidental propaganda. To instance a more familiar sphere of activity, it is common knowledge that the whole æsthetic and artistic merit of the Soviet cinema has been brought about solely by Russia's urgent need of propaganda for an education in Bolshevism.

Five or six years ago, a Russian called Lev Kuleshov arrived at the logical conclusion that what really mattered in making a film were the celluloid strips out of which a film was made. The actors, actresses and the scenery were of small value as compared with the scientific handling—the inter-juxtaposition—of the basic celluloid cut with scissors and joined with film cement. Even the story itself was of secondary importance. This method was, and still is, diametrically opposed to the American and British ideas of film production.

From this elementary conclusion which, with due deference to all film producers of to-day, should have been grasped years before the War from the early experiments of Griffith, there have been derived the constructive, scientific methods of technique which have made the Soviet cinema celebrated and are acknowledged as the foundation-principles of cinematography.

Working within set limitations to achieve a calculated purpose has often resulted in an artist producing his best work, and it is possible that these conditions are the most inducive of good results in the complex art of the cinema. The film medium is an ideal field for the exercise of technical, scientific and engineering interests. The constructivist nature of its principles makes it an admirable experimental ground for the logical, well-ordered mind. But film technique is so absorbing in itself that it may well satisfy the mind of the director without its purpose of expressing a given content being accomplished. So much lies between the film director and his eventual work on the screen that he is inclined to become interested in technical matters during production to the detriment of the content. A considerable lapse of time and the co-operation of at least half-a-dozen other persons is necessary before the creative director can see his completed work on the screen. A hundred technical devices conspire to thwart his expression of an idea. All in all, the cinematographer experiences the greatest difficulty in concentrating upon his purpose of expression while yet retaining an intimate understanding of his technical resources.

I am not sure, therefore, that a director would not be freer to become interested in perfecting his technique and exploring its attributes if his material content were allotted to him for expression. At least he would have a set purpose in mind and would be able to draw upon his storehouse of technical knowledge for its adequate representation.

We know that much of the technique of the

Russians developed in this way through the aim of expressing a policy, and the same may be said of some American productions. Both Eisenstein and Pudovkin were sufficiently interested in the technical side of their work to allow the content of their films to be supplied to them. Thus it happened that two such highly-trained, scientific minds came to be at the disposal of the Soviet Government for disseminating Bolshevik propaganda. For this same reason, we find that their later films lack a direct urgency of purpose and are more inclined to be exercises in technique than vital expressions of propaganda. The anti-British theme of *Storm Over Asia* was too childish to be efficacious because Pudovkin was not in the least concerned with that aspect of the picture. *The General Line* was admirable only as an exploitation of various experiments in technique which temporarily amused its director. Its flippancy was quite certainly disliked by its Communist sponsors. Similarly, Dovjenko's *Earth* was considered too bourgeois to be good propaganda.

An architect or an engineer employs his technical knowledge in the creation of a work of practical value. Contemporary functional architecture is not the expression of an individual. Personal expression in painting ceased to exist many years ago and is only to be found in the Royal Academy and kindred institutions. There is more art to-day in a six-wheeled omnibus or a Schneider Trophy seaplane than in all the contemporary art galleries of London. And the qualities of a film director are not unlike those of an architect or an engineer, save that his work does not achieve its value until mechanically set in motion. When a bridge is built, it is a bridge and may be crossed, but a length of film is merely celluloid until it is projected on to a screen. Nevertheless the processes of construction in both cases have a distinct affinity.

Film propaganda may be said to fall roughly under two heads. Firstly, there is the film which wields influence by reason of its incidental background propaganda, sometimes harmful but generally beneficial to its place of origin. Secondly, there is the specifically designed propaganda film, sponsored as an advertisement for some industry or policy, conceived either as a direct piece of advertising, or in an apparently casual manner so as to disarm the suspicions of an audience which is looking for entertainment.

Incidental background propaganda is present, of course, in practically every theatrical film wherever its origin. Because America produces the great majority of films for the screens of the world, it is only natural that tremendous advertisement should issue from every American studio each time a new film is released. Such a big picture as *The King of Jazz*, with its impudent melting-pot into which the music of the world is poured to bring forth American jazz as the supreme music, is to all intents and purposes straightforward incidental advertisement.

Adopting the point of view of an outsider and not that of a filmgoer, we observe that American films set out to appeal by their brilliance of appearance and by their sensational bigness. They overawe the filmgoing public by their flatulence. Film after film from the studios of America puts forward the same idea of achievement. All along the line of attack, the general characteristics of their product are youth—enterprise—ambition—light-heartedness—love of work—summed up in one word, energy.

As a rule, American heroes fall into one or other of two categories. Either they are of the tough, he-man variety like Jack Holt, Gary Cooper or Richard Dix; or they are clever, ambitious young men who " get there in the end," like Raymond Hackett, Robert Montgomery or Frederic March. They are a perpetual encouragement to the youth of America to progress and attain its ideals. Likewise the smart, sophisticated, beautifully-groomed young women of American films are for the most part a model to American womanhood. They teach courage, good appearance and smartness. Women like Joan Crawford, Natalie Moorhead and Carole Lombard are typical exponents of this incidental propaganda.

The majority of the interior sets of American pictures are the essence of spaciousness and modernism. Their appearance is always polished and slick, appealing to the audience to achieve a similar standard of living. The sets in all Paramount's sophisticated comedies are noteworthy for their brilliance of design and surety of decoration. Excellent examples are seen in *It Pays to Advertise, Love Among the Millionaires, Up Pops the Devil* and films like *Laughter* and *Honour Among Lovers.*

In the same way, their pictures of open-air stories are wonderful propaganda for the spaciousness and beauty of American landscape; either its great stretching horizons, its giant trees spreading upwards or the perpendicular thrust of its skyscrapers. Films of achievement and human endeavour are plentiful. The opening up of the Great West or the building of an industry are frequent excuses for entertainment. *Cimarron* alone is a marvellous advertisement for American enterprise, with its city arriving overnight, a transition from wooden huts to gigantic business bastions in the space of a few years—America! *The Virginian, Fighting Caravans, The Great Meadow, Hell's Heroes* and *The Santa Fé Trail* are further cases in point. Each one of these films, released all over America, England and the British Empire, is showing that America is a growing nation ever striving to achieve greater and bigger things through work and energy.

Such incidental propaganda may be advantageous as far as it goes, but on the other hand many films from Hollywood are stamped with the chaotic sentiments which characterize that amazing city which possesses no ideology. A great number of American films fail to be a proper crystallization of public sentiment because the social influences of Hollywood are entirely undirected. It is a widely accepted fact that there exists an immense lack of social understanding throughout America, and I have heard it stated that if the American public is ever to be brought to any degree of culture, it will perforce be through the medium of the movie. But the astonishing conflict of ideas, the medley of social strata, and the tangled outlooks of such a polyglot production-centre as Hollywood are quite unfitted to vouchsafe the making of such films.

Unmistakable proof of this false social understanding is seen in ninety per cent. of America's sophisticated drawing-room films. Upon analysis, we find that such a film as *Dance, Fools, Dance* or *The Tarnished Lady* is erected upon an entirely unsound basis. The players have no true relation to the story, nor the story to the setting. These American movies are simply hero plus heroine plus background without any proper unification. When compared with such a film as *Die Dreigroschenoper,* their social relationships fall asunder, whereas the Pabst film is the result of a perfect understanding of human values and their environment. A still more forceful comparison can be made between *The Love Parade* and *Le Million*, which when considered from a non-technical point of view are poles apart.

However much we may deplore the star-system, there is no doubt that it is a godsend to the great American public in that it is something on to which they can grip. The standardized direction and semi-intellectual value of most Hollywood movies force the intelligent filmgoer to interest himself in the characterization of the actors. And whilst in theory we may admire the uplift of the American incidental propaganda film, with its spacious settings and brilliant trappings, it should be realized that this perpetual influence is perhaps persuading people to live above their economic level and is possibly causing moral instability.

Nobody will deny that the propaganda of *The Front Page* in all its wildness is nothing more or less than anarchism. It is the most unmoral film that I have ever seen on the screen in London, just as it is one of the most technically interesting. It is an argument for individualism run riot, for infidelity of mind, for complete sacrifice of principles and scruples for personal advantage. It holds up a news-editor, utterly unprincipled and crooked, but so charmingly played that he invites our admiration. The same remarks apply to *Scandal Sheet*, in which even when proved a murderer the editor of George Bancroft is a " good guy." In both cases we are being asked to admire a murderer. Further instances of this incidental, undirected but dangerous propaganda abound. Although probably oblivious of the fact, the gorgeous-minded Cecil B. de Mille produced some excellent Bolshevik propaganda in the first half of *Dynamite*. Mamoulian's brilliantly directed *City Streets* is shattering in its stark barbarity of gangster life.

Perhaps the only commendable background propaganda to emanate from Hollywood is the Western film, for the simple reason that in these open-air pictures the Americans are dealing with environments and social values which they thoroughly understand. Moreover, the backgrounds of desert and pine-trees and horses are uncontaminated by the distorted attitudes of Hollywood's production-executives, despite the enforced intrusion of sophisticated cowboys and heroines from New York City. The Western, exemplified in *The Virginian*, is the truest and most sincere form of American incidental propaganda.

The boundary lying between this background propaganda film and the film specifically sponsored as an advertisement is difficult to fix with any exactitude unless the facts are available in each case. But there

American *United Artists*

The Front Page

is little question that we are on the eve of an enormous campaign in film advertising, a movement that has already been in progress for some time in America.

In fact, America has for many years subtly employed the screens of the world as advertising space for its industries and agriculture as well as for its national self-assertiveness. Moreover, credit is to be given to it for having done the job so efficiently. The tremendous impetus behind the whole American film to-day is largely brought about by the wishes of Wall Street, the virtual controllers of policy in the Hollywood and other American studios. After a recent trade depression following on a New York slump, orders were issued to Hollywood from the powers in the background in Wall Street that films scheduled for this year's production should be the customary boy-and-girl romances set against an industrial or agricultural environment, in an attempt to strengthen general industrial and agricultural conditions in America. Incidentally, the sum allotted for production in Hollywood this year is, I am given to understand, in the neighbourhood of forty million pounds. It is obvious that the Americans consider this indirect method of advertising, by familiarizing their public with the interiors of factories and the workings of big industrial concerns, to be the most valuable stimulant to trade.

The majority of the sponsored propaganda films are not publicity films in the old sense that they hold up some proprietary article before the eyes of an audience and command them to buy it. On the contrary, the most delicate care is taken to conceal the real purpose of the film, which may be either a musical comedy or a drama in the ordinary theatrical manner, without any relation whatsoever to the product advertised. In such cases the firm in question relies for its result on a credit title at the beginning of the picture, or on the subtle introduction at one point of the article being publicized. An example may be cited in the film version of *The Silver Horde*, from Rex Beach's novel, financed by the Icy Point Salmon Company of Alaska.

The success of such efforts depends largely, of course, on the theatre circulation over which the commercial film company which produces the film has a release. Paramount, for instance, have been very successful as regards short sponsored pictures because of their big theatre-circuit arrangements, but the quality of the films was not startling. I understand, also, that objections are being raised by audiences at having this form of entertainment forced upon them.

Co-operation between American Government Departments and commercial producing firms is apparent in the many films that we see of the American navy, air force and army. Films like *Flight, Submarine* and *Dirigible* are incidental but none the less forceful propaganda for American national interests, whilst the same sort of interworking is officially arranged for industrial subjects, such as *Men of Steel* and *Danger Lights*, in some cases the industrial firm sharing the cost of production.

To the student, the most interesting aspect of this increasing relation between specific propaganda and the cinema is that out of the urgency of expression, whether of an idea, an industry or a product, there is likely to arise a technical standard equal if not superior to that of the Soviets. Such films as *Broadway Limited, Philadelphia* (made as propaganda for that city), and *Coast to Coast* (made for T.A.T. Maddox Lines), all committee-made pictures by Visugraphic, and Dr. Watson's *Eyes of Science,* a film of lenses made for Bausch and Lomb of Rochester, demonstrate this progress in technique. There is this strong factor to recommend the propaganda cinema to our attention, that skilful publicity—whether direct or incidental—demands a high standard of film technique if it is to be successful both as propaganda and as entertainment to cinema audiences.

With this in mind, it is worth recalling that the Soviets developed the original cinematic experiments of Kuleshov entirely along propagandist lines—intensely specific propaganda at that. They discarded the use of professional actors and actresses. They left their studios and travelled far and wide in search of suitable natural material with which to emphasize the particular Bolshevik theme supplied to them by State scenario-bureaux. Many hundreds of purely documentary films have been made within the last few years in the Soviet Union, for keeping the workers in touch with the progress of the State, for educating the illiterate peasants, and for the edification of the intelligentsia of Great Britain. It is impossible not to be impressed by the way in which the Soviet films are giving dramatic value to modern Russia, to Soviet grain, Soviet railroad construction, Soviet collective farming, Soviet electrical development, Soviet lumbering, Soviet leather, Soviet rice and a multitude of like subjects. Furthermore, it is significant to point out that one of these films, Turin's *Turksib*, has been booked at more than two hundred cinemas in Great Britain. To which I might add that *Turksib* is, in Stalin's opinion, the exemplary propaganda film as distinct from the bourgeois quality of the much disapproved *Earth*.

What the cinema has achieved so admirably for Russia it might well accomplish for Canada. It is true that many short films, some of them very lovely pictorially, have been made under the supervision of the excellently equipped Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (a section of the Department of Trade and Commerce at Ottawa), but so far these have not developed to any high standard of technical interest. The distribution for these films is very large and represents the most impressive achievement of the Bureau, for not only is the circulation widespread over Canada, but contacts have been established in such distant places as Australia, New Zealand, most of Central Europe, France, Germany, America, Japan, India, Scandinavia, and, of course, Great Britain.

There are a hundred Canadian subjects which call for dramatic film treatment in the manner of the Russians, basis for pictures which would circulate all over the world when made with natural sound and advanced methods of cutting. The policing of Canada's Arctic Empire by the North-West Mounted Police; the development of the air-mail routes; the airway to Europe by Baffin Land; Canada's wealth of water power; the breaking up of winter and the glorious coming of a Canadian spring; these are subjects which, if well handled, would excite the world.

The general position with regard to the use of the cinema for propaganda in England appears, like so many other new ideas, to be complicated and uncertain. Apart from the work being done by the Empire Marketing Board film unit, very few contacts have been established between industry and cinema. The root of the trouble would seem to lie in the conflicting opinions as to what should be publicized and how it may best be done, whilst no great aid to the problem is afforded by this country's general ignorance of all matters relating to the better uses of the film. Industrial firms are shy of the cinema and the latter, dominated by vulgarians and cheap showmen, does not go out of its way to invite confidence. A number of small publicity films manufactured in the old vein are in circulation, but have little or no connection with our inquiry into the film as propaganda. As far as I am aware, Ralph Smart's excellent film *Port Sunlight* for Lever Brothers, the same director's short picture for the Boy Scout's Organization, *The Woodpigeon Patrol,* and Hankinson's slum reform film are the only examples of modern propaganda cinema in England, with the exception, that is, of the films of the Empire Marketing Board.

The work of John Grierson and his drive for British Empire propaganda stand isolated from the mediocrity of British film production as a whole. Grierson has realized to the full the varied merits of the Soviet cinema, and through analysis has come to an understanding of the expressive technique employed by Russian cinematographers. He has profited, also, from the films of Flaherty and from the conquering quality of the Westerns, as well as benefitting from his experience of audience-psychology investigation in America some years ago. To-day he is succeeding in building one of the most interesting aspects of modern cinema, the propaganda film for the produce and welfare of Great Britain, its Dominions and Colonies. In fact, it may be said that this film unit of cameramen and directors which Grierson has gathered round him is the only side of the British cinema that is destined to be of importance, the only branch of production in this country which has vitality and impetus in its work.

Both Grierson's own films, *Drifters* and *Conquest*, are too well-known to call for any further comment, and his first natural sound film of the Port of London is awaited with impatience. Of other directors in the unit, Basil Wright has given evidence of his ability in cutting, and has recently embarked on a sound film dramatizing the milk industry that bids fair to set the pace for future propaganda pictures.

An outstanding feature of the output of this unit is the variety of short poster films produced to advertise the natural wealth of the Empire. These are directed and edited with an almost complete freedom in technique so long as their advertising message is clearly and powerfully expressed. Whether dealing with how many National Mark Eggs were sold in 1930 or with the various grades in which Scottish National Mark Tomatoes are sold to the public, this is film direction with a set purpose in mind—that of telling a very large public something of far-reaching importance to the future of the British Empire. Some of the material for these pictures is specially photographed, others are

SHAKESPEAR

British *E.M.B.*

From an E.M.B. Film in Progress

composed from old material selected for the purpose, but in either case editing and cutting—the basic factors of film making—are their strength. For the expression of some particular contents, abstract effects and trick photography are employed so as to give an added power to the appeal of the film. It is interesting to note that the abstract film, usually considered as a highbrow article to be left well alone, is in this case harnessed to a purpose and is the better for it.

Varying degrees of abstraction expressed in the purely cinematic terms of editing, cutting and pictorial composition are brought into use to put over statistical facts on the public. Such short abstract films are not shown in the ordinary commercial cinemas, but on continuous automatic projectors at exhibitions and scattered in prominent places, such as big stores and railway stations, throughout the country. In brief, the technical aim of these pictures is to attract a passing crowd with every foot of their length. Their full message must be expressed by practically every shot as well as by their sum. They may well be termed posters in movement, and it is obvious that their production calls for as much skill and ingenuity as any theatrical story-film.

Although I am confident that we are on the brink of a widespread advertising and propaganda campaign through the powerful medium of the cinema, and that it is probable this movement will evolve some remarkable new forms of technique, not only in fresh uses of the screen image but in new forms of sound and perhaps decorative colour, I would point out that the course of the propagandist film director is far from smooth. It is likely that many of the cinema's best minds will be engaged in this fascinating problem and that cinematic geniuses of the future will emanate from the film of direct intention, but at the same time the task will be fraught with difficulty. There will always be certain aspects of industrial production which the tactful director must not observe, and his choice between stating the truth or sweetened advertisement will be a dangerous one. Even at the moment, I have noticed propagandist directors avoid a true statement of material and hedge the main controversial issue by spectacular effect and Tattoo-like treatment of certain incidents in order to cover up the nakedness of the facts.

CINEMA AND EDUCATION

Closely related to the development of the sponsored film, the use of the cinema in education must of necessity step forward to meet present-day demands. Whilst the mechanical achievement of synchronized speech has set the millionaire movie-makers off at a jog-trot in the wrong direction, the introduction of sound has given an enormous fillip to the production of films as documentary aids to education and cultural co-operation. Hand in hand with the progress of the specific propaganda film, there must come a tremendous advance in the use of the cinema for purely educational purposes.

Much ground has, of course, been covered in this respect, but at the moment of writing there is little attempt at co-ordination or employing the full resources of the cinema in any of the countries so far embarked on educational film production. For example, many educational pictures available to schools and other places of teaching are merely superficially descriptive instead of being analytic in treatment. Probably this is due to the failure on the part of authoritative bodies to make clear to producers the high standard required, the result being bad technique as well as the production of numerous incompetent films. This criticism applies forcibly in England, where relations between educational authorities and the cinema have not been happily arranged. It is not unusual to find cameramen sent out at random to shoot material without proper directorial supervision, whilst frequently producers look after administrative work when the administrators themselves are perhaps editing. It is obviously most necessary for the production side of the educational cinema to reach a pitch of efficiency before anything else can be done.

The French Government Film Commission realized some years ago the necessity for special cinematic technique and were fortunate in securing the services of such an admirable director as Benoit-Levy, who devoted his organization to the development of the technique required for agricultural films. Moreover, the intelligent and sympathetic attitude adopted by the French Press to documentary and cultural cinema has greatly aided matters in that country. I have already mentioned the production activities of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau in propaganda films of Canadian scenery. The same

Bureau issues many educational films, some of which —made for the National Parks Branch—are specially produced to familiarize Canadian audiences with the different aspects of Canadian bird and animal life, while others deal with such varied subjects as ice-observation and the campaign against the gipsy-moth. Generally speaking, this type of film lacks a definite dramatic value, thus reducing its educational potentialities.

In America, film units have been established in several of Washington's Government Departments, some undertaking their own production whilst others have their pictures produced by outside commercial companies. The Bureau of Mines, for instance, induces large industrial concerns to sponsor its productions, which are taken on by a commercial company under the supervision of officials from the Bureau. The Departments of Agriculture and Labour, also, are interested in production on a small scale, but are not particularly acquainted with film technique. On the other hand, the Department of Commerce, which until now has acted very efficiently as a kind of information-bureau for the film industry as a whole, proposes shortly to begin a special news-reel unit with the aim of publicizing every branch of American industry. No doubt arrangements will be negotiated to release these short sound items through the ordinary cinemas.

There can be little doubt that we are on the verge of an extensive revolution in methods of education which will be brought about by the cinema. The old ideas of teaching and the old systems of elementary schooling at present employed will be replaced by new methods organized on a vast scale and made possible by the sound film. It is probable that within ten years' time the cinema will be the principal means of education for both adults and children, and that the comprehensive ideas which the Soviets have already put in hand for cinematic teaching will have spread to every country. Every subject taught to-day will be available in terms of film on standard-sized stock and will be in permanent use at every school and institute of any standing throughout the world. Interchange of systems between foreign countries will be easily possible, cementing friendly relations, achieving a much higher standard of cultural relationship and establishing a better understanding of national outlooks. If such a thing were possible, it is by the cinema or the younger art of television, that a universal language could be effected.

What form the technique of educational films will take is a matter for argument. Some opinions hold that the dialogue commentary, as employed in the more recent *Secrets of Nature* series, in conjunction with the visual images of the subject under discussion, is the most explicit. Others, I amongst them, believe that the visual-and-title film, suitably amplified by the actual presence of a teacher, will be the most effective, but then I happen to be one of the few who consider that the subtitle, especially in motion, has a great future before it. But experiment must be forthcoming before the form of the educational film can be fixed. Whatever the method, it is certain that cinematic education will be present in every school, institute and college, not only because of its obvious superiority over present methods and its facilities for standardization of systems, but in order to meet the demand of future generations who will be film-minded. Educational authorities who raise objections against the use of the cinema invariably forget this most important point, that the public of to-day and the growing generation who will form the public of to-morrow are rapidly becoming film-conscious, even though authoritative bodies may remain blind to the potentialities of the cinema.

It is true that various commissions for educational and cultural films are already in formation and give appearances of investigating the ground, but unfortunately they seem to spend more time in inspecting the past than in widening their vision to embrace the future. We still find persons talking in terms of silent educational films shown on sub-standard projectors—a method that may be obsolete before many years. It is most urgent that these responsible bodies should grasp the immensity of their problem and look ahead rather than back at the miserable past of the educational cinema.

REPERTORY FILM MOVEMENT

Remarkable though it may seem in consideration of the large public interested in the serious side of the cinema, there has not as yet been established a repertory theatre of the film. Most filmgoers will admit, I think, that there are certain films of the past which, because of their achievement at their time of making and because of their influence on later production, should be available to the student and the filmgoer for reference as well as reminiscence. There are many pictures of the silent period which for emotional value and sincerity of purpose remain unsurpassed, and in my opinion it is a matter of grave importance that these films should be preserved, not only for the benefit of students to-day but for the pleasure of future generations.

The extraordinary growth of the private film society movement in England during the last few years—there are now, I believe, some fifteen or more active groups—clearly indicates that serious interest in the cinema is increasing. The film is first and foremost the art of the people, for of all the arts it comes nearer—or shall I say it has the capacity for coming nearer—to presenting ideas of common interest than any of the lesser means of expression. Year by year, film by film, more and more people discover that the cinema is the natural medium of the twentieth century, a synthesis of art and science that has long been the aim of intellectual activity, until to-day there must be thousands of persons who wish to see its attributes employed as they properly demand.

There are two ways in which this desire to see good films, both current and repertory, can be met—either by the private film society or by a permanent repertory cinema. But both of these solutions possess their obvious drawbacks. A film society is limited in its programmes by expense and by the increasing difficulty of procuring desirable films. A repertory cinema, if made available to the general public, which I deem essential, is open to restriction of its programmes through censorship. Yet whilst neither of these movements fully meets the requirements of the enthusiastic film student, they nevertheless deserve the warmest encouragement from anyone who cares for the future of the cinema.

Although in many ways the film society movement is admirable, there is always an inclination amongst restricted membership groups towards preciosity, which in the case of the cinema is fatal to a proper understanding of the medium as a whole. There is a prevailing tendency at the moment for film society members to favour vague phrasings of a distinctly "arty" nature, attributing a variety of meanings to films and their directors of which the latter are quite innocent. It is fashionable to talk airily of subject-value and attach too great an importance to irrelevant theories of technique, which not only defeats the aim of societies but brings general disfavour upon the works of perfectly competent and simple-minded directors. Too few of these enthusiastic amateurs penetrate to the heart and meaning of cinema; they are happy to bandy slick phrases one with another and avoid the real significance of the film medium.

This effeminate dilletantism would, I think, be largely eliminated if a permanent specialist cinema could be established, possibly on the lines indicated, but not as yet realized, by the Film Group. It is essential that this movement for better cinema should originate from the public itself and not from the wishes of an elite few. The successful but brief career of the Avenue Pavilion, London, to some extent met the wishes of this more discriminating public, and the popularity which that cinema attained may be taken as part evidence of the need for a more up-to-date scheme. In recent months, several enterprising exhibitors, having scented the way of the wind, have played seasons of silent revivals. The indiscriminate selection of their programmes, however, and their obvious ignorance of what films deserve showing has limited their appeal to the student. Mention, also, must be made of the excellent work during the last five years of the London Film Society, who have done much to encourage the serious appreciation of the cinema among a certain restricted public.

What is desperately needed, what I have tried many months to achieve, and what eventually must be established despite all obstacles is a central cinema in London, where will be shown films selected as the best of their particular type by an appointed advisory committee of competent specialists. These programmes should be composed wherever possible of new foreign sound films in their original versions, revivals of good silent pictures to meet the demand of the new film-goer, with the plentiful addition of comedies, sound cartoons and a properly edited news-reel. No film exhibited at this cinema would be presented without a definite reason for its choice by the advisory committee, who would amplify their reasons in the cinema's printed programmes, which would also include interesting data concerning the film in question. Attached to the cinema would be a Club-room and Library, for the use of those members of the general public who desired to become intimately associated with the policy of the scheme. Lectures, demonstrations and exhibitions could be arranged to meet the wishes of these more serious filmgoers; and for reference in the future, an information-bureau and file of still-photographs should be begun under proper supervision.

Affiliated to this central cinema, the various provincial film societies would be certain of a regular supply of interesting programmes (which is their present difficulty) as well as the advantages of interchange of opinions and lectures. In this way—which is, of course, the policy originally laid down for the Film Group but not at the moment of writing fulfilled—a definite cultural centre of cinematography such as exists nowhere in the world would be begun in England which, moreover, would secure for the future much intensely valuable information which is difficult to obtain even to-day.

The widespread lack of knowledge with regard to films of the past, their hire, history, condition and whereabouts, tempts me here to stress the immediate importance of taking stock of what the cinema has already accomplished in its comparatively short span of life. The time is at hand when the achievements of cinema should be recorded whilst they are still fresh in our minds. It is surely a matter of much urgency that we should document this great medium which is developing so rapidly before it has passed altogether from its primitive stage. In this respect but little help is forthcoming from the Press, for all but a scanty few writers are uninterested in the development of the cinema, being content to describe with vague lightness the pictures of the week. Neither does the industry itself in this country display any inclination to extend facilities to this outstanding need, for big profit-reaping concerns and theatre-chains booking films on block have little concern for the welfare of the cinema. Furthermore, there is not any British paper or magazine that deals in a comprehensive and at the same time intelligent manner with the gradual development of cinematography. It is, then, the duty of this organization which I visualize to fulfil this want and to make a start with this vast business of selecting and appraising the major works of the film.

The task will be difficult even now, for films made but a few years ago are frequently untraceable to-day, and not until accurate information is sought will it be appreciated how hard is the work to be done. When it is realized that only two positive copies exist of such a celebrated film as Robison's *Warning Shadows*, and that those are both privately owned; that there is only one copy each of *Destiny* and *The Golem*, both held by Ufa; and that copies of such instructive films as *The Love of Jeanne Ney, Moana, Thérèse Raquin*, and *Forbidden Paradise* are unobtainable in England until someone shall step forward to pay the cost of a fresh copy, the importance of the work is merely suggested. This is the position which has to be met if any move is to be made—and in the interests of the film both as an art and as an industry it must be made—to put the cinema on the basis that it deserves as the predominant medium for expression of culture, philosophy and propaganda of the century.

THE CREATIVE CINEMA

In allowing ourselves to admire the past achievements of the cinema, however, we must never permit our interest in the great silent films to obscure the bigness of the future. Sooner or later, each one of us will realize that the cinematic medium is an integral part of our lives, that it is the vital means of expression to-day, and that the film is the dominant factor in the tremendous electrical revolution of the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

The film takes its place at the front of the great move for freedom of thought and rationalism of ideas which characterizes the youth of to-day—this sudden demand for functionalism after the ornateness of the Edwardians. Just as houses grow like ships and windows expand to the sunlight and air, just as space and utility are the keynotes of modern architecture, just as the speed of the age is typified in racing-'planes and speed-cars, so the film is the expression of our lives.

I realize that critics who monotonously attend trade-show after trade-show of the perpetual story-film cannot be expected to visualize this ten thousand times more important aspect of the cinema, but then their writing is only meant for the casual film fan who regards the film as a sentimental entertainment and adores the *méringue* decoration of the theatres to-day. But the real meaning of cinema—the proper uses to which it should be put—must eventually become apparent to all of us who live in a world of skyscrapers, radio and air-mails. Film-sense, by reason of its vitality and dynamicism, must in time supercede theatre-sense and literary-sense, and must be taken in the same stride as air-sense and speed-sense.

Despite the control of money and the ignorance of some producers, however, film-sense is slowly but surely developing in the commercial studios. If we keep a close watch on current films month by month, we shall observe evidence, small perhaps yet still exciting, of this awakening to the deep qualities of the cinema. But what is lacking more than anything else in the studios of Western Europe and America is an urgency of purpose—a definite, clear-cut motive imbedded in the material out of which each new film is made. This applies most particularly to the cinema of England—that cinema which so many good-hearted people declare is improving in the quality of its output. Our directors, with the exception of John Grierson and his group, lack energy, and even the more intelligent and more refined of them fail to show a passionate interest in the subjects they are treating.

I appreciate to the full the depressing handicaps under which they are working. I realize that a director cannot be expected to throw his whole mental weight into some squib of a story reckoned to be of light appeal by an uneducated scenario-editor, and that he cannot be serious when his actors are instructed to say " basket " instead of " bastard " in order to cheat the British Board of Film Censors. But if he is worth his salt, if he is a creative director in the sense that the late F. W. Murnau was, he will batter again and again at his producers until they allow him to do something worth while. The departments which are principally to blame, I think, are those from which treatments and scenarios are supposed to issue. Not until one has had direct experience of the scenarios drawn up in this country from which directors are instructed to work, can it be imagined how inadequate they are. Even technically, in arrangement of shots and lapses of continuity, English scenarists seem devoid of the most elementary ideas of film construction.

While I dislike citing Russia on almost every hand, I cannot help but stress the importance of the lesson in production that waits to be learned. Not, of course, for its specific propagandist aim but for its intense estimation of technical methods, and for its enormous desire to use the cinema as an instrument of some purpose. Although the general adoption of the talking film has cut short any far-reaching influence that the best of the Soviet films might have had on the technique of Western Europe and America, there are, nevertheless, distinct tendencies towards scientific methods of construction in some theatrical films of to-day. The showing of such films as *The General Line* and *Storm Over Asia* in America has not passed unheeded. There was evidence of clever shot-cutting in the harvest scenes of *The Right to Love,* in the fortissimo opening of *The Benson Murder Case,* and in many parts of Milestone's *The Front Page.*

In Germany, where Russian films have been widely presented during the last three years, there is a marked improvement in cutting, particularly noticeable in *Der Mörder Dimitri Karazamov, Zwei Herzen im* $\frac{3}{4}$*—Takt,* and *Drei von der Tankstelle* (*Chemin du Paradis*). In France, we find Edmond Greville employing a dual sound and sight technique that has distinct affinity to the silent technique of the Russians. In England, Asquith put forward some intelligent scenes in *Tell England*, while shot-cutting was adopted in a clever-clever manner in pictures like Hitchcock's *Murder* and *The Skin Game*. Yet the belief still persists in the trade that the Soviet principles of technique are essentially high-hat, and have been evolved along lines quite unsuited to European and American entertainment production. In actuality, the Soviet cinema is first and last the medium of the people and is essentially universal in its constructive methods.

That the use of speech is gradually spelling paralysis to the popularity of the cinema is surely not difficult to observe. American cinema audiences are said to be drifting towards the legitimate theatre now that films no longer show them the things they want to see. With its pursuit of the spoken word, cinema has ceased to fulfil its proper obligations and has instead given new life to the flesh-and-blood appeal of the stage. In time it will be realized what was obvious as soon as the first talking film was produced—that the sound of objects and things must be considered as entirely different from that of the human voice.

It is of point, I think, to analyse our reactions when we see and hear a dialogue film spoken in a language with which we are unfamiliar. At once the speech becomes sound and loses its literary value, leaving our mind free to follow the movements of the screen material, just as Arabic or Persian writing appeals to us purely from a pictorial and non-literary point of view. If we were to witness some madly fantastic film in which the players spoke a gibberish tongue without meaning, the sound and visual appeal would be similar to that of the purer examples of *Mickey Mouse*. Both the dialogue and the images could be blended into a single form of expression quite unobtainable in a talking film recorded in English.

Sound can help the cinema as a means of expression just as speech is proving detrimental to it. A thousand instances can be seen in the films of to-day where sound is of the greatest value for enhancing the dramatic effect of a scene and rousing the emotions of an audience, while in the same films dialogue is limiting freedom of expression.

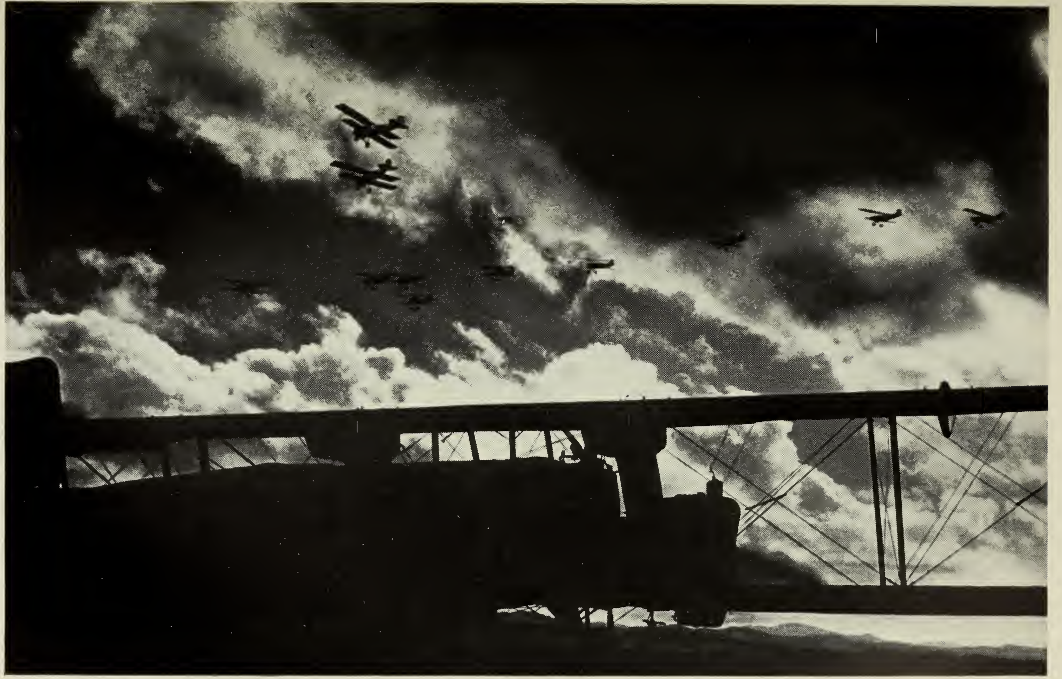
The cinemagoer is a member of a crowd, often one of two or three thousand persons, all of whom are simultaneously seeing the same programme, and who, by their presence together, are creating a mood which is not the mood of any single one of them, but the mood of them all. If the drama or comedy projected on the screen and issuing from the loudspeakers has been skilfully constructed, the appeal is there for the whole audience to receive according to their individual amount of intellectuality and their susceptibility to physical sensation.

In connection with the cinema, it is clear that every emotion of the mind is based on sensation, a nervous process that has for its foundation, material reality in the human beings and things recorded by the camera and microphone, ranging from sudden shock to smooth transfusion according to the will of the director. As the Russian cinematographer Eisenstein has pointed out, there is no essential difference between the physical movement expressed by the cutting of a film and the movement of the intellectual process within that film, save that the former produces a physiological effect and the latter creates a psychological effect on the audience.

In *Hell's Angels* there is a memorable sequence of some magnificently daring flying which bears hardly any relation to the story of the film, but every nerve in our bodies is tingling with the physical excitement of watching the swooping aeroplanes and hearing their whining engines. Intellectually we remain unmoved, but physically we are greatly stimulated. On the other hand, to take an old example, the famous harvesting scene in *The General Line*, we are engaged in following the intellectual process of the theme while its significance is being strengthened for us by the physical emotions aroused by the swinging movements of the scythes, the length that the shots are being held on the screen, the decreasing intensity of light, and, had the film been synchronized, by the sound of the wind and rain of the oncoming storm. In other words, the material on the screen and its method of presentation is used to create a physical sensation in the audience which assists the acceptance of the film's intellectual theme, whereas in *Hell's Angels* the flying is employed merely for its own sake as a sensation and not for any deeper purpose.

Most American pictures which are not adapted from stage plays are constructed along the lines of the scene in *Hell's Angels*, because the comparatively small attention paid to the story or intellectual significance of a film by American producers causes their pictures to rely almost wholly on physical thrill for their appeal. The striking predominance of sex in American films can be traced to this method of box-office attraction. As a rule, American and British directors and producers consider the actors, actresses and sets of more importance than the way in which they are cinematically represented on the screen.

When the dialogue cinema replaced the silent film, the old ideas of chases, stunts and sensational spectacles were for some time forgotten under the mass of adapted stage plays which had a certain intellectual value. The resulting chaos, which has already been described, was not unreasonable. Well-constructed stories without much action, intended specifically for the narrow spatial limits of the stage, were photographed without any regard to cinematic value, with the result that the appeal of the film lay in its stage dialogue and restricted theatrical acting. A few directors recognized this conflict of two entirely different aims, and turned again to simple episodes of sensational Tattoo-like effect, which when heightened with natural sound were very effective. Outstanding in this class may be reckoned *All Quiet on the Western Front, Tell England, Cimarron, Trader Horn, The Dawn Patrol*, and, of course, *Hell's Angels,* while the predominant episode in *The King of Jazz* was the voodoo-dance, as thrilling to the senses of the sophisticated citizen as was the original, on which it was based, to the primitive minds that first conceived it in African forests. Each of these films is physically



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HELL'S ANGELS

stimulating in material, but for the most part negligible in intellectual value.

Anything that has been achieved since dialogue and sound became a possibility has been more by good luck than by good management. It is imperative that experiment and study should be pursued by theorists in the employ of big companies until a film is produced in which a story is told purely in terms of moving screen images, set to a mechanically-recorded score of real or distorted sounds interwoven with creative music. Then, and then only, will the cinema be in a position to progress to a perfect medium of expression for the entertainment and education of the multitude. Then only will the cinema be rid of its vulgarity, tawdry sensationalism and mock-sentiment.

There has been much accomplished in the past that will be incorporated in the sound and visual cinema of which I write. The cinematic science of the Soviets; the brilliant musical scores written for *Battleship "Potemkin," Berlin* and *The Ten Days that Shook the World* by the late Edmund Meisel; *The Last Laugh*, the work of the late F. W. Murnau, which showed that a film could be silent, do without titles and achieve perfect continuity of thought and incident; the innumerable instances of sound rhythm and distortion in the Disney cartoons;[1] the artist mind of Dovjenko with its beautiful groupings; the camera-sense of Pabst; all these will play their part. I believe, also, that there remains much to be achieved with the movement, colour, and contraction and expansion of titles, faintly suggested in the best of the American "trailers." The big field which exists in the relationship between titles and images offers great scope for a creative artist, and may result in some new form of title that will be of exceptional interest to the sound medium.

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[1] In passing, I cannot refrain from commenting on the many plagiarisms of Disney's work, all of which fail to comprehend the supreme artistry that brings *Mickey Mouse* and *The Silly Symphonies* into being.

But it will not be easy or quick to make such films. In the first place, it will call for the special writing of thematic stories, and more care than at present will have to be expended on production details. I foresee that the quantity of films produced will decrease and that each film will be given a longer run at its particular cinema, being sufficiently entertaining to sustain being seen twice or even three times. This will be in accord with my belief stated earlier, that cinemas will become more specialist in their programmes and more limited in their appeal but infinitely more valuable from an entertainment, cultural and æsthetic point of view.

Moreover, it is possible that the era of the cinema as a vast entertainment, notorious for its flamboyance and extravagance, famous as a showman's clap-trap spectacle, is rapidly on the wane, and that the next few years may see the film assuming its proper level of commercialism and its right scale of values. It is not unlikely that when television reaches a practical stage and is introduced into the homes of millions of individuals, the super-cinema and the super-film will cease to have mass appeal and will thus make way for the more serious aspects of the medium.

Television is as yet in its laboratory stage, but that it will develop into a practical commercial proposition within a few years must be accepted as certain. The existing chains of broadcasting stations are, of course, the future bases for the transmission of images as well as sound by radio, proof of which may be found in the gradual acquisition of existing stations by the big electrical companies. But that television will displace the cinema need not be feared; the cinema failed to displace the stage, and radio to discourage the human orchestra. On the contrary, I think it likely, for reasons already stated, that television may assist the cinema in finding at long last its proper level as a means of expression for philosophy, propaganda, culture and education.

In the meanwhile, regardless of its self-abuse, cinematography pursues its own course, zig-zagging and ragged perhaps, but this is only to be expected in such conflicting circumstances. It is such conflict that breeds cinematic progress and brings fresh minds to bear upon its problems.

REVIEWS

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CITY LIGHTS

Written, Directed and Produced by Charles Chaplin

(*Released by United Artists Corporation,*
Los Angeles, U.S.A., 1928-31)

During the thirty odd years for which the cinema has existed as a medium of expression, no other film has received such advance publicity as that accorded *City Lights*. No film has ever been more eagerly awaited by the general public, the small-witted intelligentsia and the film trade itself. Fanned to a pitch of semi-hysterical anticipation by the Press, the cinemagoing public was prepared to find in Chaplin's new comedy a masterpiece of humour, eclipsing the brilliance of both *The Circus* and *The Gold Rush*. And, moreover, certain among this public expected a promised relief from the unceasing dialogue of the talking film.

For Chaplin's unwavering adherence to the film without speech but with a synchronized musical accompaniment had for three years been the subject of discussion and the butt for hostile criticism. When the tidal wave of dialogue swept through first the American and then the European studios, there was a considerable amount of speculation as to whether

Chaplin would employ the spoken word or remain silent. By some it was rumoured that his voice did not record well—an assertion that has long since been disproved—by others that he feared to lose his world-wide reputation if he spoke; whilst in truth Chaplin merely stood fast by that marvellous natural instinct for the cinema which he has always possessed since the Keystone beginnings, and which is shared by other eminent film personalities who know enough of their medium to realize that speech is fundamentally foreign to the cinema.

The importance attached by most of the American film producers to Chaplin's decision with regard to dialogue cannot be over-estimated. Not that it was prompted by any real desire to see the cinema continue along its right curve of development, but because Chaplin, it must always be remembered, has a very wide appeal throughout the world, wider probably than that of any other film actor, and the bookings on his pictures represent considerable financial profits. Quite apart from Chaplin's status in the art of the cinema, producers cannot afford to ignore his box-office attraction, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that practically the whole of Hollywood hung in suspense with bated breath and quivering bank balances to watch the public's reception of a film without speech.

In order to realize the significance which the showing of *City Lights* was to have, it will perhaps suffice to mention that during 1930 an average of one hundred and twenty telephone calls per week were made to the New York office of the United Artists

Corporation by people interested to ascertain the date of the first presentation. No film as yet distributed by that company at that time had ever drawn so many requests for advance bookings from exhibitors in every part of the world. It is to the point, also, to recall that *The Circus* still holds the record takings at the Mark Strand Theatre in New York, receiving £16,200 in one week, just four times as much as the film which had been showing the previous week. At the Dominion Theatre, London, *City Lights* took £12,200 in its first week in February of this year. Some slight idea as to the extent of Chaplin's commercial value and of the importance accorded by producers to the making of *City Lights* may be gathered from these figures.

And not only because of its promise of no speech has *City Lights* assumed world-wide notability. In the trade it has caused confusion and bad blood, for Chaplin's terms of renting have been the subject of heated argument, to which at the time of writing no satisfactory decision has been reached. Bitter to the last and jealous of his vast appeal, irritated possibly that his retention of subtitles suggests a triumph over monotonous dialogue, the trade watches Chaplin as if waiting for the chance to tear him down. By their refusal to accept his terms for the picture, certain circuits of cinemas may hope to boycott *City Lights*, for if they can succeed in beating down Chaplin it may affect the renting prices of pictures for some years to come. Even the popular Press shares this jealousy of Chaplin, and during the presentation of *City Lights* in London several cruel and singularly small-minded articles appeared calculated to disturb his well-earned success.

It is obvious that Chaplin would not have challenged the film companies of America and Europe on the battlefield of speech and silence without a great deal of forethought. A man who has spent eighteen years of his life achieving greatness in one medium and with his responsibilities would not, in the face of the universal adoption of the talking picture, spend three years and the larger part of his money on the production of a synchronized film without being absolutely confident as to the correctness of his beliefs.

From the time when the recorded voice was first employed in conjunction with screen images, Chaplin must have observed the futility of the attempt. But it is one thing to realize an absurdity and quite another to ignore it, or even to be in the position to pass it by with contempt. In all probability Chaplin, being an independent producer-director, was the only man in Hollywood who could afford to be guided by his own convictions. Unlike other directors, he was not obliged to carry out the instructions of a production-committee. He was free to stand by his decision that dialogue was a menace to the screen's power of expression. He was free to establish his belief in himself and his belief in cinema before the assembled audiences of the world. And, above all, he was free to retain the universal appeal of his language, the visual appeal of acrobats, dancers and clowns, in fact the integral essence of slapstick; whilst the remainder of the industry had crippled its markets in spite of the futile attempts to make multilingual pictures.

The idea underlying the theme of every Chaplin film is easily comprehensible to anyone, irrespective of nationality, to a greater or lesser extent of understanding according to their sensitivity. This simplicity of appeal is more apparent in the love story of *City Lights* than in any of Chaplin's preceding pictures. And because the appeal is based quite logically on the fundamentals of the science of the cinema—movement expressed in terms of pictures set to a perfectly fitting accompaniment of musical sound—it is wider than that of the dialogue film with its limits of nationality. Moreover, *City Lights* possesses two qualities without which no film can be really successful—imagination and inventive power—both of which have been almost wholly absent from the cinema during its dialogue phase. For three years, at least ninety-five per cent. of the world's film output has been concerned with the spoken word; it was left to Chaplin, the foremost director in America, to exert his influence and prove that the pursuit of speech was unnecessary. Undoubtedly *City Lights* will enjoy wide success, particularly because it is the work of Chaplin, but still more because it provides the relief from speech for which the majority of people have been waiting with such remarkable patience.

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A slender thread of narrative usually supplies the story-interest of a Chaplin film, a simple theme drawn from the dozens which comprise the complexity of living from day to day. Around this central motif are hung innumerable comic situations, mere incidents to provoke uproarious laughter resulting from Chaplin's amazing faculty of invention. But however amusing these comedy gags may be in themselves, never for one moment does Chaplin forget the main theme of his picture.

The love of a penniless tramp for a beautiful but blind flowergirl which forms the story of *City Lights* has by now become celebrated. Yet I would again remark on its extreme simplicity of construction and the perfectly straightforward manner in which it is unfolded to the audience. The continuity has the admirable smoothness which we have come to expect from Chaplin; its merit will be revealed by a comparison with almost any talking film of to-day.

Opening with a magnificently conceived scene of the unveiling of a statue to " Peace and Prosperity " by the eloquent officials of a large city, we discover Chaplin recumbent in blissful unconsciousness in the lap of the central figure. (Incidentally, how delightful is this burlesque on statues and how typical is this particular one of the sort that most citizens admire!) After immoderate laughter as we watch his efforts to descend from his couch, he escapes the inevitable arm of the law and wanders aimlessly along the streets, pausing here and there to inspect an artshop's window, until passing conveniently through the doors of a stationary car, he encounters the dream of his life—the flowergirl by the railings. We are enchanted by his immediate adoration but suddenly we touch pathos as he realizes, almost clumsily we think, that she is

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CITY LIGHTS

blind. A moment of prickling emotion (for right at the beginning we are convinced of the hopelessness of his love) when unwittingly she empties the dirty water from a vase over him as he sits by the railings watching her actions, and then he is away into a rapid series of gloriously funny situations with his suicidal millionaire friend, who whilst drunk adores him but when sober completely forgets his existence.

Onward through a succession of brilliant gags until again we meet the flowergirl and Chaplin becomes her beloved friend. By all manner of clever contrivances, suggested by the use of sound, she is made to imagine him a rich and handsome young man. Why should she not, when he buys every flower in her basket with money borrowed from the drunken millionaire? Only we and Chaplin share the tragic truth and scent the coming disillusion.

Having established his love, again he plunges into slapstick with that wholeheartedness which is essentially Chaplin's, until we return to the girl and learn of her distress. Money is needed for rent and Chaplin, determined to preserve his position in her estimation, sets out to earn the required amount. But inevitable misfortune awaits him at every turn. He becomes a street-cleaner only to be dismayed by a procession of circus animals; he enters for a boxing contest with deplorable results; but eventually, after horrible suspense, he exacts not only the rent from his millionaire friend but enough to cure the flowergirl of her blindness.

For a while he goes to prison for having robbed the millionaire, who unfortunately becomes sober enough to deny his gift. Then, after months have passed, he is released, and we follow him slouching once more along the side-walk. By chance, the victim of a newsboy's peashooter, he pauses beside the flower-shop in which the girl, now cured of her blindness, is installed. Taking pity on his dilapidated appearance, she gives him a flower. He stares at her with bewilderment—fear in his eyes as to what she will think if she sees in him her benefactor. Still without knowing him, she jokingly gives him a coin so that he may pay her. As she takes it from his hand, she suddenly recognizes the familiar touch. She gazes perplexedly at this odd little man, scarcely believing her eyes, whilst he waits her decision. Then, as his expression is still that of hope as she looks at him with confusion, we slowly fade to a dark screen with a close up fixed in our minds that is amongst the few to be remembered for ever.

It is quite beyond my power adequately to describe the emotion aroused by this moment of terrible intensity and agonizing suspense. Coming at the close of the picture, after all that has gone before, it lifts the cinema high above its companion arts. In no other medium could such suffering be so strongly and feelingly expressed, especially in one that counts the spoken word among its attributes. Here, as at a hundred other places throughout the film, we breathed a prayer of thankfulness for Chaplin's silence. All the pathos in the world is on the screen in this concluding shot of the most fragile love story that has as yet been conceived in the cinema.

That is the story of *City Lights*: it would seem a slight skeleton for what is in my opinion one of the most moving and certainly one of the most entertaining films produced during the dialogue period. But in its slightness rests its power—the power of simple appeal—as the expression of a single personality.

Chaplin is Chaplin to all mentalities and to all classes. The fact that he delights the severest critic does not affect his world-wide popularity. He has always appealed to a vast number of filmgoers who revel principally in his comicalities, in the sight of his bowler hat and his big boots, in the succession of ridiculous situations into which he wanders, and in the diversity of funny characters against whom he pits his ingenuity. I do not think that the great masses which flock to his films see deeply into the pathos underlying these humorous adventures, but there is no reason why they should not enjoy his pictures, as indeed they do, to their hearts' content.

The truth is that a Chaplin film touches so many aspects of life that every kind of mentality can find something of particular application to its own existence. The profundities of *City Lights* are so deep down that few probably of those who have seen it have plumbed it to the depths. Delight for the masses, by which we mean entertainment, lies easy to behold on the surface. Everyone can see the humour of *City Lights*, especially when the gags are so well invented. You, I and the man next to me, all laugh when Chaplin swallows a toy whistle out of a cracker and it sounds its doleful note every time he hiccoughs. He is a figure of fun to the meanest intelligence. When the flowergirl drenches him with water because she is blind we burst into laughter, but our mirth is checked abruptly as the significance of the incident dawns on our mind. For a moment, perhaps, we are sad and then Chaplin, with his genius for timing the exact length for which to hold a mood, whirls us away into pure slapstick.

Yet when the picture is finished, we are left buoyed up by hope and enthusiasm, for despite his pathos Chaplin's spirit of endurance is never allowed to flag. Failure after failure reward his efforts, his well-meaning intentions are frustrated by wrong interpretation, but still his energy persists and he conceives some fresh miracle of ingenuity by which to attain his ends. We laugh as we watch his discomfiture, but we know that it might well be our own.

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The most conspicuous quality in the direction is Chaplin's honesty of treatment. He is perfectly frank in the handling of each scene, using only the bare essentials of the material to convey his meaning. Never by any chance does he attempt to be clever or to achieve an effect by any but straightforward methods. No incident catches our eye without it playing to the full its part according to plan. No object, however small, claims our attention unless it is related to the content of the scene. Everything that comes within range of Chaplin at once assumes importance. A flower, a banknote or a horseshoe becomes alive as soon as touched by Chaplin, alive in our imaginations as well as alive in its own surroundings. He constructs his situations with a minimum of detail but every object must have its value or else its presence on the screen is a waste of time. Immediately he makes contact with an accessory, there springs up an intimacy between that thing and himself. Its place in that particular scene instantly becomes apparent to us. Yet again I would stress that this simple understanding of all Chaplin's actions is not restricted to any one class or nationality; his thoughts and ideas are universal, which makes him the world power that he is.

In my estimation, though here I am at variance with many critics, *City Lights* is Chaplin's greatest accomplishment. For me it contains more creative work, more subtlety of direction and more evidence of singleness of purpose than any of his earlier pictures. It is more direct in its appeal and more comprehensive in its meaning than many of its predecessors. It is so obviously the untouched work of a brilliantly creative mind, although perhaps this is more noticeable to-day when so much mechanical product is around than when we saw that earlier masterpiece *The Gold Rush*. It seems so happily unsullied by any commercial artifices and is, of course, the better entertainment because of this. Chaplin does not think in terms of box-office values: he bases his work on a knowledge of the impulsive and natural behaviour of the ordinary human mind, which is, in effect, entertainment value. He foresees how his audience—whether in London, Lapland or Liberia—should react to any given scene and takes infinite trouble so that the construction of this scene is such that the audience cannot fail to react as he desires.

To a sensitive mind the tragedy of *City Lights* is devastating. The humour lies there on the surface, easily picked up and not long-lived, but the pathos of the whole theme and the pathetic mood of one or two individual scenes is too deep down to be lightly forgotten. I admit that I am moved beyond words by the scenes of the dilapidated but happy Chaplin and the exquisite beauty of the blind flowergirl. They move me a thousand times more than the tractors of the Soviets, Clarence Brown's Garbo, or Anthony Asquith's machine-gun. Yet I have met people who have been bored to death by *City Lights*. I even know a scenario-writer who was unable to sit through the picture.

Conceived from a multitude of aspects, every sequence and every scene, every shot and every detail of *City Lights* has been deliberately and carefully preconceived in the preparation. Chaplin is fortunate in possessing a wonderful sense of visualization. Whilst working on a set he can look far ahead on to the screens of the world and into the minds of his audiences. It is almost impossible to pick out a single shot from this film and maintain that it would have been more effective if taken otherwise. Similarly, the time-lengths of his shots on the screen are right to the fraction of a second, never a frame too long or too short. I should imagine that he assembles his shots purely on the spur of the moment. He certainly does not cut according to any orthodox formula arrived at by involved arithmetical calculation. He judges the screen-length of a shot by watching its projection, as is customary with most American editors; but so good is his technique that we in the audience forget that we are seeing reels of projected celluloid.

I have already spoken of his amazing inventiveness of detail: in *City Lights* he excels himself. The picture is filled to overflowing with evidence of his imaginative power. To take the humorous gags alone, what could be funnier than the toy whistle, the mixing of the paper streamers and spaghetti, the ascending and descending pavement lift, and the superbly staged boxing match? It would seem incredible that such simple yet, at the same time, cunningly ingenious situations have not been made use of before, but I cannot recollect having seen them. Admittedly, much of the humour of these incidents is supplied by the accessory objects employed by Chaplin, or rather I should say by the way in which he fits them to his purpose. As Gilbert Seldes has pointed out, we must never allow ourselves to forget that Chaplin owes his existence firstly to the attributes of the camera and secondly to the choice of Mack Sennett. We can never separate him from the Keystone comedy from whence he sprang and of which these accessories are a part, and it would be fallacy to attempt to do so.

On the other hand, take the scene when he is visiting the flowergirl's home. With infinite delight he presents her with a plucked duck, claps an imaginary gun to his shoulder, takes aim and clicks his tongue. She at once thinks that he, as her young and handsome hero, shot the duck. But unfortunately she begins to stroke the bird and he, anticipating the result, rapidly seizes it and places it aside before the mischief is done. His pantomime here in illustration of how he brought down the bird is little short of marvellous. It is almost comparable with the ever-memorable Oceana

Roll in *The Gold Rush.* Yet another piece of detail of the thousand that comprise this fabric of laughter is his last gesture as he is clapped into gaol—a flip of his heel to send his cigarette-end spinning with gay abandon into the air, summing up in one action his whole attitude towards life. And so on throughout the picture, touch after touch of magnificent imagination. Perhaps it is the surety of his actions which compels our admiration.

On the synchronized musical accompaniment to *City Lights* I have not much to comment. As a critic wrote at the time of its première, the music arranged by Chaplin fitted the picture like a glove, and I can imagine no better description (*The Times*, February 28th, 1931). It will suffice to say that it is never obtrusive and always has as its aim the emphasis of the mood of whatever scene it is accompanying. On the other hand, it must not be thought that this score is a definite indication of the sound film of the future, for it is far from that. Although in places the sound is employed with imagination, such as the satire of voices by musical instruments at the unveiling of the statue, *City Lights* is ostensibly a silent film with music and titles. And, in passing, I would suggest that at least half of the latter are badly written and the remainder superfluous, a fact which is rather surprising if the film received the production care which it is reputed to have done.

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I have remarked before on the tendency towards naturalness that has characterized the Chaplin pictures as one by one they have come before the public, and I have pointed out that he has gradually eliminated the caricaturish element from them. Moreover, with this transition of his characters from the grotesque to the natural, the plots of the films have become more logical, until in *The Circus* and *City Lights* they are almost commonplace. The background and supporting cast in the latter picture possess all the outward appearances of everyday places and persons, and only on occasion are used as symbols of satirical comment, as in the opening. Miss Virginia Cherrill as the blind flowergirl behaves perfectly normally and does things that a flowergirl would do; but Miss Edna Purviance, you will remember, quite often comported herself according to slapstick conventions. The crowds that shoulder Chaplin aside as he wanders along the street are similar to those employed in any American picture, very different from the extras engaged for *A Dog's Life* and *Shoulder Arms*. Even Mr. Harry Myers, whose playing as the double-minded millionaire adds much to the humour, is only eccentric in his behaviour and not unnatural in character. Such naturalness may be deplored by the fervent admirers of the old Keystone slapstick, but I feel that it does much to help widen the appeal of *City Lights*.

Chaplin is always the same likeable character. Wandering on to the screen to join a bunch of idlers, he passes through a whirlwind of adventures in which he suddenly and quite against his will becomes involved, until he leaves again a wanderer. It is three years since he was seen sitting on an upturned box in the middle of a field, gazing disconsolately at the star on a fragment of paper torn from the hoop through which the girl jumped, all that remained of the circus ring and his loved one. He shrugged his shoulders as only Chaplin can, flicked his cane, and cheerfully walked away into the distance in his inimitable manner as the screen darkened. From that empty field he has come to a great city and, homeless as usual, found shelter for the night in an about-to-be unveiled statue. Yet again he falls in love, this time it would seem with more success. In fact, the suspense of the ending of *City Lights* gives many people reason to believe that this film is his swan song, the end of all things, which I do not believe.

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If *City Lights* be regarded from a detached point of view, and if for a moment we are indifferent to Chaplin's engaging personality, we shall see that it is quite different in texture from any other current picture of American origin, and in particular from the comedies of Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. There is no quality in it to suggest that it was produced in the neighbourhood of Hollywood. It does not bear the American studio imprint as do most American films, especially the comedies of Lloyd and Keaton. It might, for instance, have been made in England, with the exception of one or two minor points such as the policemens' uniforms and scavengers' clothes. It might be a film of any city or a synthesis of all cities.

This international quality which distinguishes all Chaplin's films is, I think, worth considerable attention. It is not unconnected with the relation between Chaplin, as an independent producer-director of films, and other directors whose creative ability is held in check by the production-committee methods of the ordinary studios. A more significant example of the difference that exists between the two distinct types of film production—the individual creative picture and the mass production product — could hardly be found than a comparison between either Harold Lloyd's *Feet First* or Buster Keaton's *Parlour, Bedroom and Bath* and Chaplin's *City Lights.* All three are tremendously amusing, but what widely divergent methods lie behind their construction. And although the three films in question happen to be representative of the comedy element in cinema, the object lesson provided by their comparison—they were all to be seen in London about the same time—applies equally to other types of theatrical pictures.

While not wishing to be accused of invidious intent, I do not think that either Harold Lloyd or Buster Keaton are ever likely to be reckoned as serious creative artists, or even comedians who resort to any great lengths of imagination or inventiveness in order to provoke laughter. They are content to rely on a series of clever and compromising situations thought out with great labour by a well-paid staff of " gag-men," amplified these days by an occasional wise-crack. To all intents and purposes both *Feet First* and *Parlour, Bedroom and Bath* are mechanically constructed articles from two of the most skilled firms of movie-makers, Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer respectively, products of that one-hundred-per-cent. efficiency of organization which is the foundation of the American film industry. These pictures are calculated to make people in their millions rock with laughter, and there is little doubt that they succeed in this aim. They are played for a week or a month according to their worth, and then are forgotten, for they contain precious little to justify remembrance.

City Lights, on the other hand, is the work of three years' spasmodic but concentrated imaginative effort by a sensitive and exceptionally brilliant creative artist. Its humour is perfected by a hundred small touches that have taken many months to find their correct expression. Below its surface lies an age-old theme retold with fresh beauty and sentiment, a theme that has perhaps lain dormant in Chaplin's mind for many years and has now found its fulfilment. Into this film the man has put his last ounce of mental energy and probably the greater part of his financial earnings. It is the outcome of a single mind.

We all know which of these films deserves our unstinted admiration, but because we have paid to see each of them they are reduced to the same level. The laughter-making machines and the genius are both dependent for their existence upon a public of millions, a public which cannot differentiate between the superficiality of the one and the depth of the other while it laughs at them both. And yet it is beyond question that when in fifty years to come students make research into the development of the cinema, they will discover Chaplin in every reference, predominant then as he is now, whilst Keaton and Lloyd will have faded into oblivion.

Contemplation of Chaplin's position as an independent producer may well be made, and we can applaud his achievement of such a status, for had he not been at liberty to follow his own course when the rest of the screen talked, we should have seen him destroy all that *City Lights* means to-day with the lugubrious banality of speech. If only more directors were able to achieve this enviable position, we should have many more worth-while films instead of so many patently committee-made products. Fairbanks, it is true, has reached the stage of independent production, but amongst his many gifts he has not that of creative ability. But there are directors in America who have that power, and I would that they could aim to strike free from the trammels of studio routine. I wish that it were possible for more independent pictures to be produced, along certain commercial lines but without the tyranny of the studio executive-committees.

There are scarcely any directors in the cinema to-day who can make films as they wish, and who are allowed to rely on their own experience of what the public desires in the way of entertainment. Chaplin is not by any means the only director who is capable of independent production, but he is the only one who has broken free from the herd. King Vidor, Erich von Stroheim, John Cromwell, George Hill and Josef von Sternberg, to mention but a few, would each probably make infinitely more interesting films if it were made possible for them to do so. The stranglehold of the big companies and the difficulties presented by distribution, however, prevent this from becoming a reality.

And so, after years of hard work and shrewd foresight, as well as the development of an individual and rare instinct for the fundamentals of the cinema, Chaplin triumphs. He has defied commercialism in the interests of natural cinematic progress, and he will most probably win. At the moment, it is impossible to forecast the influence that *City Lights* will have, but it is possibly significant that speech is being severely curtailed in forthcoming American pictures, a tendency that can be directly traced to *City Lights*, and to a lesser extent to René Clair's post-synchronized *Sous les toits de Paris.*

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I am conscious that these remarks on the genius of Chaplin and the greatness of *City Lights* do not altogether reach to the root of the matter. But words are hopelessly inadequate to express emotions brought about by a constantly moving succession of images which rely for their appeal on pictorial value, and which are the product of a deep-thinking, amazingly creative mentality that has as its breath and life the fundamental essence of the cinema. In truth, Chaplin has reached nearer to the heart of real cinema than them all.

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

(*DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER*)

Directed by G. W. Pabst

(*Produced by Deutsche-First-National, Berlin,* 1931)

So familiar are we become with the technique and production methods of the American cinema, and so plentiful is the product of its versatile studios, that we are beginning to forget how much has been done in the past by the great German directors, and how much more interesting has been their approach to the heart of real cinema than that of the big American companies. Within recent years most of us have given the greater part of our time to studying the rapid developments of the sound film, and we have perhaps forgotten ideas that were arising about the period when speech shattered the silent image. It is even possible that certain trends of cinematography were submerged in the riotous rush for dialogue—more especially in the German and French films of 1929 and 1930, which overlapped into the first year of the American dialogue cinema.

Furthermore, so great has been the influx of the

American talking film into the English market that few of us have had the opportunity to see what the Germans and French are doing with the sound film. Although a few French pictures in their native tongue have been given a showing in London, of which Clair's *Le Million* and *Sous les toits de Paris* have been both the most interesting and the most popular, only a few German sound films have been shown in England up till the time of writing, and these to societies or at private demonstrations to the trade. There have been several English versions of German-produced pictures, of course, such as Uckicki's delightful *Hocus-Pocus* (renamed *The Temporary Widow*) and *The Immortal Vagabond*, Bernhardt's *The Last Company*, Fanck's *Storm Over Mont Blanc* (renamed *Avalanche*), and the Sternberg and Pommer production, *The Blue Angel*, but none of these is to be considered as a fair example of Germany's attack on the sound film, because of such handicaps as English casts, doubled voices and post-synchronized casting. Strictly speaking, I have only seen three German sound films in their original form in London—Pabst's *Die Dreigroschenoper,* Thiele's *Drei von der Tankstelle*, and Otzep's *Der Mörder Dimitri Karazamov*—all of which I regard as exceptionally good pieces of workmanship.

The Pabst film has been chosen for inclusion among these reviews principally because it follows the tradition of the big middle-period of the German cinema, and secondly because it is the most recent work of a director who, in my opinion, is one of the five most interesting cinematic minds of the century. I have yet to see a film directed by Pabst which does not bear unmistakable traces of his brilliant genius, his unrivalled use of the camera as an instrument of expression, and his uncanny ability to reproduce human thoughts and emotions in visual form on the screen. I do not claim that every film of Pabst's direction has been faultless, or that his work is always successful—both *Westfront 1918* and *The Eva Scandal* were lacking in many respects—but certain of his films, such as *Jeanne Ney* and *Crisis* in their original forms, reveal his amazing talent at its full measure of accomplishment. Thus, after three years' almost unbroken succession of American and British talking films, it is with the greatest feeling of relief that I observe what real cinematic genius means in *The Threepenny Opera*, and once again find myself afforded the opportunity of delighting in German craftsmanship and supreme technical skill.

As most close observers of the medium are aware, the German cinema has very largely developed within the limits of its studios, and has only on rare occasions—and these only recently—become concerned with material lying outside its studio walls. This particular partiality for studio structuralism, as I have explained at greater length elsewhere, is most probably due to the German's inborn love for craftsmanship combined with his national gift for mechanical experiment. These two qualities, more than anything else, distinguish the German cinema from the films of any other country. They are primarily responsible for that curious air of completeness, of finality, that surrounds each product of the German studios and which causes so many students to reckon the German middle-period as one of the most stimulating phases of cinema history so far developed. Whilst I do not wholly share that view—for reasons I have stated on more than one occasion—there is no question that there is much to be said in favour of the German method of studio constructivism, in particular the opportunities it affords for co-ordination of architectural settings, lighting and camera mobility. This highly desirable relationship has been brought to a stage of perfection in Germany by close co-operation between director, cameraman and architect, and does much to ensure the strength of expression of a film's dramatic content. Such co-operation between technicians is almost unknown in England, a fact that largely explains the uneven quality of native production.

As is only to be expected, such efficient workmanship is vital to a film of the nature of *The Threepenny Opera*, which relies for its appeal entirely upon the smooth harmony of music, acting, sets and camera-work. An operetta of this kind demands supreme excellence of technique if it is to achieve any effect, as did such musical-comedy pictures as Lubitsch's sparkling *Monte Carlo* and Clair's brilliant *Le Million*, and for this reason I commend Pabst's film to all producers who contemplate making such popular subjects.

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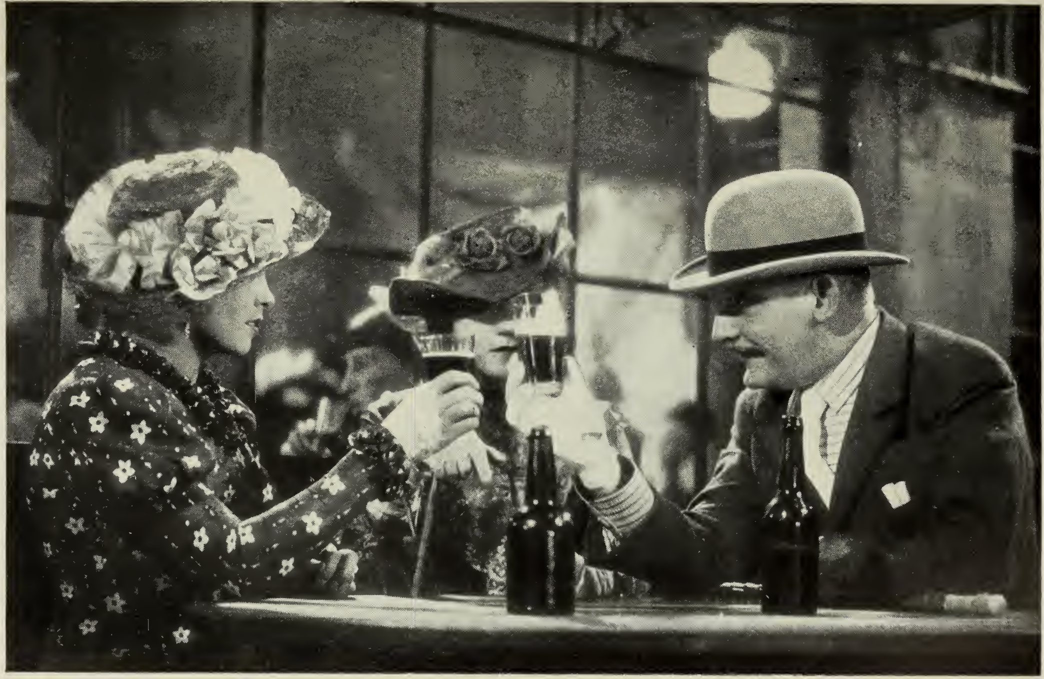
The scenario for *Die Dreigroschenoper* is loosely adapted from a musical extravaganza of the same name by Brecht and Weill, which in turn is distantly based on Gay's " The Beggar's Opera." Not a great deal of Gay's eighteenth-century spirit remains, however, in this new version, which is as unlike the famous revival with Lovat Fraser decorations some years back as could be imagined. Whilst there will be many admirers of the latter who will deplore such filching from this celebrated operetta and resent this complete redressing and resetting, personally I find it singularly refreshing and less arts-and-craftsish than the Lyric production. Instead of an eighteenth-century London, we have substituted a most delightful, fantastic underworld set in a district approximating to Soho in the 'nineties, which is close to a romantically conceived dockland, with gay-life cafés and the most naughty yet highly diverting houses of ill-repute.

Any reader familiar with Pabst's work will at once appreciate what admirable scope such an environment gives for his love of darkly-lit, macabre settings, and for curious twists of vice and virtue. It can well be imagined how he delights in showing the romantic philanderings of Mackie Messer, the new Macheath, who is the captain of the so-called gang of London Apaches, and how Pabst portrays for our joyous entertainment the scandalous exploits of this charming hero.

At the opening of the film, Mackie falls in love at first sight with Polly Peachum, the beautiful and spirited daughter of the King of the Beggars, and marries her out of hand at a sumptuous wedding feast staged by his gang out of stolen goods in Mackie's sinister underground headquarters. When the wedding night is over, Polly steals home and breaks the news to her irate parents, who promptly declare that she must divorce her newly-wed husband. Polly, of course, refuses to permit this, and Peachum goes to his friend, the Prefect of the Police, who also happens to be a good friend of Mackie, and tries to arrange at once for the latter's arrest. Warned by Polly of his danger, Mackie prepares to escape, but falls in with some old flames from the neighbouring brothel. He escapes the arm of the law, however, through the aid of his late love, Jenny the Whore, only to be caught as he leaves the abode of yet another attractive *cocotte*. The business-like Polly, meanwhile, has taken charge of the gang and has decided to fly on a higher plane by running a bank. But her father, incensed because he has not been able to obtain justice, plans to upset the Coronation procession by organizing a parade of his beggar-legions to spite the Prefect of the Police. He learns too late of Polly's success as a business woman, and fails to stop the trooping army of beggars from breaking up the procession. Whilst this is taking place, the faithful Jenny contrives Mackie Messer's escape from prison, just as Polly is arranging to pay the ransom for his release. Learning of her success, Mackie returns to Polly's extended arms, and the film comes to a happy conclusion with the launching of a new firm with Mackie and Peachum as the directors. Borrowing from Gay's original, the picture is interrupted at regular intervals by a street singer, who gives a brief résumé of the action and explains for the benefit of the dense-minded why and wherefore the characters are behaving as they do. In all, an amusing piece of light-hearted nonsense strung together with a brilliant parade of wit and a multitude of intriguing situations.

Passing over for the moment the polish of the



German *Deutsche-First-National*

DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER

character-playing and the subtle handling of the incidents, I would comment principally on the architectural environment which Pabst and Andrei Andreiev have jointly contrived for this comedy of manners.[1] Not solely on account of their individual merit as designs do I draw attention to these sets, but because they are the envelope, as it were, of the film. Without the self-contained world that they create, a world of dark alleys, hanging rigging and twisting stairways, without their decorative yet realistic values, without the air of finality and completeness which they give, this film-operetta would not have been credible. It is partly by reason of the queer, fantastic atmosphere created in this dockside underworld that this film is lifted on to a plane by itself. This is due not only to the settings in themselves, but to the very close relationship maintained between the players and their surroundings, which has come about because the director and the architect have to all intents and purposes worked with one mind. Each corner and each doorway is conceived in direct relationship to the action played within its limits. This factor, together with the co-operation of the camerawork, builds the film into a solid, well-formed unity.

Actual instances of such dovetailed workmanship are too numerous to be detailed in full, but I praise especially the set representing Mackie Messer's headquarters, a piece of creative set design which deserves to be put on record. Presumably situated beside the wharves, it is built on three levels, the roof reaching to a considerable height. From a door at the top, an incredibly steep and very long flight of narrow wooden steps descends to the middle level, from which the inimitable Mackie Messer dictates his questionable correspondence to his secretary, who is seated at least twenty feet below him on the lower level. What a delightful touch of humour is this! On all sides of the set rise up great barrels, ridiculous barrels of absurd height and girth, yet how admirably original. Mackie's dressing-room consists of smaller barrels placed slightly apart, behind each of which he vanishes in turn to complete his toilet. Outside there is a salubrious erection of piles and arches and small bridges, a perfect ideological world for the Apaches of London, hung about with slanting masts and drooping rigging. The most delightful part of it all is that when the gang emerge from their huge cellar by the door in the ceiling, they arrive on the normal level of the streets outside.

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[1] M. Andrei Andreiev was the architect for Wiene's *Raskolnikov*, Feyder's *Thérèse Raquin*, Pabst's *Pandora's Box* and Bernhardt's *The Last Company*, amongst other films.

Quite different but equally amusing is the late-Victorian brothel, with its paper-patterned windows and antimacassars, its multitude of useless ornaments and its giant negress statues standing about the room. Every detail in these sets is placed there with a definite purpose—to create the mood for the scene. In the twisted streets, in the prison, in the angular office of Peachum, in the underground café, this same striving for atmosphere is apparent and is tremendously successful. No other films in the world can create such an architectural environment so well as those of Germany.

This intimacy between the director and the architect is not all. The camerawork and lighting also are closely related to the settings and the action. The remarkable photographic genius of Fritz Arno Wagner must be added to the creators of the environment.[1] His lighting, camera set-ups and camera movements are worked out in careful relationship to the sets and the action. When the camera is in motion, the smoothly sliding pan glides from one figure to another across the set with a perfect respect for its material. Low-level or high-level, its set-up and path of direction is governed by the mood of the scene, which is also the mood created by the set.

The shots and their relationships are so inseparably the joint work of Pabst and Wagner that their perfection is beyond proper description. All through his career Pabst has been distinguished for his genius in selection of photographic angles to convey meaning, and when working with such an expert technician as Wagner, the result is not to be approached by any other production unit whether in America or Europe. It were useless for me to describe these images detail for detail. I can only say that for me they represent the peak of technical achievement of this kind, and that they prove beyond question that perfect harmony of thought between director, cameraman and architect is indispensable if a film is to obtain complete success. This is a fact that might well be studied by British studio executives whose conflicts of opinion and therefore disharmony of working is notorious.

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[1] Outstanding films photographed by Fritz Arno Wagner are: Lang's *The Spy*, Grune's *At the Edge of the World* and *Marquis d'Eon*, Murnau's *Dracula*, Pabst's *Jeanne Ney*, Robison's *Warning Shadows*, and Lang's new sound film. In my opinion, he is the most skilled cameraman in Europe.

Moreover, especial reference should be made to the prevalence of moving camerawork in *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Since the introduction of the spoken word into film making, there has been a growing tendency to decrease the number of direct cuts in a picture, partly because of the desire to minimize the amount of different camera set-ups and partly on account of the difficulties attendant on cutting and joining the sound strip. Some attempt to counteract this handicap (although it is not considered a handicap by directors of the theatrical type) has been made by employing two or more cameras playing on the same scene for a greater length of time than was customary in the days of silent production, and by cutting up the resultant film strips according to their various viewpoints. Although this device greatly speeds up shooting-time in the studio, to anyone concerned with good technique the marked variety of lighting and monotonous rotation of the same angles that result from this method are distressing. The effect is not unlike that of an amateur's " montage " film or a patchwork quilt, and its particularly intolerable unevenness may be profitably studied from the Tom Walls stage-pictures, *Tons of Money*, *On Approval*, *Plunder* and *Canaries Sometimes Sing*. On the other hand, the help given by this method to a director who can think in terms of constructive editing is greatly to be welcomed, especially if he should place his cameras with a view not only to their visual angle but also to their sound volume.

As cutting has been minimized for the sake of speech, so the movement of the camera has correspondingly become more frequent, until in such films as *Morocco* and *The Front Page*, the instrument is in motion practically throughout the picture. This, of course, has come about only since cameras were freed from their entangling booths. The result of such continuous movement on the part of the spectator, which is what camera movement actually amounts to, cannot be called altogether pleasing, for as well as violating the fundamental cinematic principles of cutting, the perpetual motion seriously disturbs the comfort of the audience by bewilderment and eye-strain.

Mobility of the camera has always demanded discretion in its use, and has been proved suitable only to certain kinds of action, just as cutting has been found indispensable when achieving stimulating effect. An instance of admirable moving camerawork may be seen in the famous tracking shot over the roofs and down into the street in Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris*. It is significant from a technical point of view to note that the wide difference existing between the Russian cinema and that of America is apparent in that whereas the Soviet cinematographers rarely employ the camera in motion, American directors strongly favour the travelling camera shot, having assimilated the idea from the Germans in the days of *Vaudeville* and *The Last Laugh*. It would seem that this tendency towards the elimination of the direct cut between one shot and another in favour of the moving camera is but one of many, of which the wide-screen, stereoscopic effect and colour are others, all leading the cinema back towards the single scene and actual temporal limits of the theatre, instead of pursuing the scientific methods of cutting initiated by the Soviets.

As far as *Die Dreigroschenoper* is concerned, the moving camera is noteworthy in that it is used not so much for economic reasons as for its assistance in establishing the relationship of the characters with their environment. Pabst is far too skilled in cinematic sense to allow mere convenience of camera mobility to interfere with his fine expression of mood. This film abounds with instances of his uncanny instinct for selection of camera angles, particularly when several characters are grouped together. In addition to which, he employs his favourite method of making every cut from one shot to another on a movement, so that the eye of the spectator is carried smoothly from image to image, aided by the sound. This style of cutting will be remembered in *Jeanne Ney* and in *Crisis*, both significant pictures in Pabst's career.

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In each of his earlier films, it will be recalled that Pabst has displayed an interest in the mental and physical make-up of his feminine players, with the result that he has often brought to the screen women who have been unusually attractive in a bizarre, neurotic manner, very different from the brilliantly turned out, sophisticated but stereotyped women of American pictures, or the dreary young ladies favoured by British directors. Pabst is one of the few directors in the whole film business who has any understanding of women. Whatever part they are required to play, or whatever clothes they wear, the women in Pabst's films never fail to be interesting, and those in *The Threepenny Opera* prove no exception to the rule.

To instance a small detail of the picture, the chance meeting of Mackie Messer and the stray street-girl after the former has escaped from the brothel is one of the most amazingly well-handled incidents that I have ever seen on the screen. How it is contrived I do not pretend to know, but Pabst extracts the very last ounce of meaning out of the scene. The enticement of the woman and her physical magnetism are brought out in all their human strength despite the fact that she herself is far from being attractive in the ordinary sense of the word. Similarly, Messer's indifference gradually turning to fascination is remarkable. An effect of cynicism is not gained wholly by acting, but by Pabst's rendering of the scene, by his choice of angles and by his deep psychological understanding of the elements of the situation. The scene in itself is an admirable example of his close penetration into the depths of human behaviour, and the way in which he recreates an ordinary human experience on the screen. Further evidence of this extraordinary quality abounds in the film, as in the diverting women of the brothel, the scenes in the café, the wonderful reunion between Jenny the Whore and Mackie Messer, and the treatment of Polly throughout. To any close observer of Pabst's outlook, these are in direct tradition with certain scenes in *Pandora's Box*, *Jeanne Ney*, *Westfront 1918*, *Crisis* and *The Diary of a Lost Girl*.

I stress this fondness Pabst has for employing unusual types of women because I believe both the American and British executive-committees would do well to give it thought. The day of the star and her physical glamour must assuredly come to an end, to be replaced by the more direct appeal of an actress's personality and intelligence. It is significant that Marlene Dietrich has built for herself a reputation solely upon the strength of her playing in *The Blue Angel*, hardly a sympathetic rôle, and that Greta Garbo's fascination lies really in her potential intelligence. I say potential because as far as I am aware, Miss Garbo has not yet had an opportunity to play a suitable part. British producers maintain that sex-appeal creates the star, and that unless an actress can make every man in the audience wish to sleep with her she is incapable of star-magnitude. That this attitude is wrong and incidentally extremely harmful is obvious to any intelligently-thinking person, but unfortunately nothing is done to counteract it.

Under Pabst's direction all the cast of *Die Dreigroschenoper* play with an exquisite charm and purposeful deliberation of gesture to correspond with the fantasy of the plot. Rudolf Forster makes an engaging Mackie Messer in grey bowler-hat and canary-yellow gloves; Carola Neher is immensely attractive as Polly; Fritz Rasp and Valeska Gert, familiar to all followers of the German cinema, bring experience and humour to Mr. and Mrs. Peachum; whilst those who remember the genial Communist attaché in *Jeanne Ney* will delight once more in Vladimir Sokolov as Schmidt the Gaoler.

Good as the poised acting may be, it is the direction of this film that causes its cynical drollery and sinister melodrama to be so effective. It is the controlling, creative mentality of Pabst that combines the thrills of a crook drama with the light melodious atmosphere of an eighteenth-century operetta. Whilst the plot is essentially one of wit and humour, nevertheless we feel through it all a sense of drama. It is a supreme genius of cinematic art that can bring out the subtleties of the situations, envelop the whole delightful extravaganza in charm, and still preserve a touch of dramatic feeling. The direction of Pabst grows on one and becomes curiously fascinating. Like *City Lights*, *The Threepenny Opera* is at its best when seen for a second time.

With Pabst as the main creator, the music of Weill, the photography of Wagner, and the settings of Andreiev, *Die Dreigroschenoper* assumes an air of vitality unprecedented in sound films of this *genre*. It has parallels, perhaps, in Clair's *Le Million*, Thiele's *Drei von der Tankstelle* and Lubitsch's *Monte Carlo*, but admits nothing superior. It is possible that the film was more enjoyable to me because I am not widely acquainted with the German language and consequently treated the dialogue as sound in accompaniment to visual images, a point which still further endorses my argument that the literary use of words is detrimental to the cinema. But quite the funniest thing about this film is that it is forbidden in France because it might offend the susceptibility of the British people in its burlesque on a royal procession.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Directed by Lewis Milestone

(*Produced by Universal Pictures, Universal City, California, U.S.A.,* 1929-30)

It is not often that the occasion arises for Hollywood to be complimented on an achievement, but when it does, the process of congratulation becomes doubly entertaining. For so many years the American film industry has to our way of thinking consistently done the wrong thing that when a notable work of undeniable merit is produced—not by accident but by deliberate intention—we may well express surprise, and doubt what we have just witnessed. Knowing the picture sense of the Hollywood showmen as well as we do, it is disconcerting, to say the least, when these hard-boiled celluloid exploiters, quite suddenly and without any warning, produce a film that is outside the ordinary limits of Hollywood picture production. But then this is half the amusement of the film business —this delightful unexpectedness.

Within the last few months anything might have come out of the Hollywood factories, for so great has been the conflict of opinion over the dialogue cinema that we have been led to expect that the Americans may yet bring forth a film which will shatter our carefully nourished, critical European standards of cinematography. Every now and again, amidst the welter of ordinary output, Hollywood pulls off something big. There is *Cimarron*, for example, and there is *All Quiet on the Western Front.* I willingly admit that for the first time Universal have surprised me.

Universal have a reputation for sensationalism on a large, opulent scale, and a name for lavishness of spectacular effect, all of which have often concealed a rather hollow kernel. They have to their credit a multitude of sins for which *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a welcome atonement. Most of us have not yet forgotten the case of *The Phantom of the Opera*, especially since, having allowed some time for the notoriety to subside, Universal tried to put over the picture a second time by adding sequences in colour and incidental dialogue, and by spreading gigantic posters over the whole face of a prominent London building. It is not as if the picture itself was worthy of such advertisement.

To their faults I would add the synchronizing of dialogue to *The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, a curiously ineffectual attempt to make an already popular silent film more popular; and the production of *Resurrection*, unrivalled for its sentimentality.

There is nothing odd in the fact that Carl Laemmle should have fallen for the idea of making *All Quiet on the Western Front.* It is in the direct tradition of Universal policy to buy the film rights of a novel that has sold over two million five hundred thousand copies throughout the world, a sale second only to that of the Bible. But Cecil B. de Mille had already bought that. It is precisely the sort of sensational gesture that is typically Universal in its theatricalism. When the information was received of Laemmle's new coup, there can have been very few critics who believed that the proposed film would contain any of the noble sentiments of the book. What we expected I am not quite certain; in all probability some gigantic medley on *What Price Glory?* lines, with moments of bathos, and a cast of two million. On the strength of Universal's reputation, I deplored at the time that *any* American firm should attempt this Herculean task, and instanced the buying of the film rights of Remarque's book as a typical case of securing rights without regard to their filmable quality. I was wrong: because for once Hollywood did the exact opposite to what was expected.

Universal belied all their time-honoured conventions of picture-sense. They apparently threw their love of sensationalism to the winds of chance, since it has been stated that Carl Laemmle gave his promise to Erich Maria Remarque that the film would adhere faithfully both in spirit and incident to the book.

Whether it is due to Uncle Carl's pledge or to the supervision of Laemmle Junior or to the skilful direction of Lewis Milestone, there is no doubt that Universal have made a very remarkable film out of *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Not only is the direction of Milestone intelligent, but the pacifist and futility-of-war moral of the film goes even further than did Remarque in his book. Not only is the novel there on the screen, incident for incident, but there is something more, something culled, possibly, from the smallest paragraphs in the story. Universal have not only resisted the temptation to embellish the narrative but because of their fidelity to the printed page, the film is over-long and inclined to be repetitive.

After seeing Milestone's picture through three or four times, the predominating reaction that was left on my mind—apart, that is, from its propagandist drive which to me was effective only on the first performance—was the painstaking manner in which the thousand and one incidents of the novel have been skilfully incorporated with the onward march of the film. The scenario-writers, Maxwell Anderson and George Abbott, have done their difficult task of adaptation extremely well. It is not easy to adapt a book of this kind, written in a graphic and somewhat impulsive style, especially when the action is episodic rather than continuous. On reading the novel again after seeing the film, I have nothing but admiration for the continuity woven by the scenarists, and in particular for the skill with which they have shrewdly selected the most interesting detail from a pictorial point of view and entwined it with the main events.

The timing of the first attack is masterly. All through the opening sequences, from the cleverly matched-up tracking shots in the schoolroom, the gradual quietening of the blaring military band into the schoolmaster's voice, the eagerness of the young recruits, the grim irony of the parade-ground scenes, up till the scene in the dug-out, we are waiting for our first taste of bombardment and attack. And when at last we are submerged in shrieking shells and bursting earth, when our senses are deadened with noise, the reaction is tremendous. Of its cutting and sound effects I will write later; what is our concern at the moment is its significance in relation to the rest of the film. This sudden raising of the emotions comes about a third of the way through the picture, and is balanced later by another terrific attack. These two spectacular panoramas are the high peaks of emotion, modulated by the less exciting moments at the hospital, Baumer's leave, and the scene with the dying Frenchman in the shell-hole. But throughout all this action and counter-action, the film rushes forward on its fatal theme. Never does the incidental interfere with the main stride of the picture. The details which we remember so clearly from the book, Kemmerich's boots, the extra portion of rations, the dialogue about the cause of the War, the scene with the coffin in the churchyard—these are all so well fitted into the main continuity that the film sweeps on unhindered in its bigness.

The scene in the dug-out when the young recruit breaks out into his ravings of fear is handled with admirable restraint. Earth drops through the cracks in the loosely-boarded roof every time a shell bursts near. Katczinsky and Paul keep up the spirits of the despondent group. The tension is drawn to the finest pitch of high emotion, until suddenly the boy starts his whimpering and rushes out into the open trench to escape over the top. As he breaks into the open air, we feel for a fleeting moment the very reality of the scene and understand the terror in that boy's mind. In view of the farcical way in which similar scenes have been treated in other war films, Milestone deserves the highest praise for his restrained direction. The same may be said of the scene in the hospital when Kemmerich is dying, and the tactlessness of Müller as he tries to persuade the unhappy Kemmerich to give him his yellow leather boots. And later, when Paul realizes that Kemmerich is but one of thousands similarly hurt and that there is no reason why more care should be taken of him than of the others. Paul takes the famous boots and comes out into the sunshine, the fresh open air, into a world full of marching troops and movement. He comes abruptly from death to life. He starts walking quickly and thinking strange things until he is running. Back in the dug-out he quietly gives the boots to Müller, who eagerly accepts them and puts them on. Paul can think only of Kemmerich. We dissolve rapidly through a series of shots showing the future happenings of the boots, changing from owner to owner as each in turn is shot. How useless is a good pair of boots when their proud possessor is lying with his mutilated face in the mud. This small commentary of the boots, lasting only a few seconds, is good; it emphasizes more than anything else in the whole film the minute-to-minute existence led by the men, the suddenness of death.

Not all the picture, however, reaches this level. There are several scenes in which Milestone has failed to bring out the full content, chiefly, I think, because he has relied too much on the " acting " of his players and too little on the use of his cameras. The whole of Paul's leave at home is ineffectual and needs drastically reorganizing. In the first place, the choice of Beryl Mercer as Paul's mother is far from satisfactory. Her stupid whining completely shatters the tremendous dramatic significance of the scene. Paul's bitter speech, also, when he returns to the class-room and finds the schoolmaster still exhorting fresh youngsters to die for their fatherland, loses much of its sting, principally because Milestone has not here paid much attention to his camera set-ups. Another disappointing scene is the famous incident in the shell-hole between Paul and the dying *poilu* whom he has stabbed, which fails on account of its lack of intimate handling. The " acting " of Lewis Ayres is not powerful enough to bring out the full poignancy of the situation, and Milestone gives him no aid by dramatic angles or cutting.

Fortunately these incidents are absorbed in the grim inevitability of it all and the film continues to a magnificent conclusion. I would comment especially on the last scenes when Paul arrives back from his leave. At this moment, as he looks round at his company and sees little boys in the place of the soldiers he had left a few days back, we realize to the full the vast difference that exists between " here " and " there." And when he goes out to join Kat, the crafty veteran who is nearer to him than his own mother and father, it comes as a stab of stark reality what war has done to these men.

Moreover, Lewis Milestone succeeds in establishing the tragic atmosphere of a defeated army in these closing scenes. Everywhere there is apathy mixed with a sickened determination to fight to the bitter finish. The end comes rapidly after Kat's death, and it is beautifully done. Cross-cutting between Paul, unconscious of the conflict around him as he puts out his hand to touch a butterfly settled on the bare earth, and a French sniper taking accurate aim through the telescopic sights of his rifle, we watch for the inevitable to happen. The only sound is a distant mouth-organ. It seems an age as we wait. It seems a century. We long to shout and warn Paul. The sniper makes his final adjustment to a hair's breadth. We see Paul's hand, the butterfly, and the bare earth. Suddenly, without warning, the silence is rent as if by the lash of a whip. The spang of a broken piano wire. A sound precisely the opposite of what we expected. Paul's hand jerks back. It is over.[1]

I wish it were. But, ten thousand pities, it is not. The final shot of the film utterly shatters what has just gone before. It is a shot, taken from earlier in the film, of the soldiers whose lives we have followed. They are marching away from us, glancing back over their shoulders, whilst below them is superimposed a battlefield of crosses. It conforms, as can be seen, with all that we have previously associated with Universal.

I understand two endings to *All Quiet on the Western Front* were made, the one by Milestone and the other by Carl Laemmle Junior. Milestone's idea was to show thousands of newspapers rising from a printing press, bearing in Remarque's words the army report for the day of Paul's death: " All Quiet on the Western Front." It is not good, but it is preferable to the one by Laemmle Junior which was used. In actuality, the film should have ended on the shot of Paul Baumer's hand, the butterfly and the earth, with the hissing twang of the sniper's bullet left stinging in our senses.

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[1] I understand that the hand, supposedly of Paul Baumer, in this shot is actually that of Lewis Milestone, who was determined to take part under his own direction.

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The cognoscenti of the film world will delight when they discover that Lewis Milestone is a Russian and studied mechanical engineering in his youth, but at the same time they must admit that the direction of *All Quiet on the Western Front* is essentially as American as that of *Cimarron*, *The Birth of a Nation* or *The King of Jazz.* The only traces of European influence in his film are found in the cutting, and then only in the sequences of attack.

Milestone seems to have been first associated with the film industry as an editor for Universal, probably the best way in which to gather knowledge of the cinema. Later he received several opportunities for direction from other companies and he made two good pictures: *Two Arabian Nights*, a comedy, and a bootlegger melodrama with the late Louis Wolheim, *The Racket.* In both of these he displayed a flair for well-chosen camera angles and for motives of tension contrasted with unexpected movement of material. These qualities, together with his knowledge of editing, go far to explain his handling of *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Universal claim, of course, that his work reveals true genius, and for this reason they have put him under contract to direct further pictures for them.

I have a great respect for Milestone's ability, but I would not as yet call his talent genius. He is a very competent director with a sound knowledge of cinema; he knows what he is about and he succeeds in obtaining his effects, but he is not yet fitted to rank with directors of the calibre of Pabst, Eisenstein, Pudovkin or Dovjenko. He has considerable technical accomplishment, but I am not certain whether he possesses the creative instinct of a great film director. There is much in *All Quiet on the Western Front* that does not rise above the level of ordinary direction. The film has not, for example, the compelling dovetailing of shots that distinguishes Pabst's genius in *Westfront 1918*. It has not the deep, human intimacy that makes Pabst's film so powerful. It is a picture of the War as we expect a picture of the War to be from a popular point of view. It is the bigness of Remarque's theme rather than the drive of Milestone's direction that carries *All Quiet on the Western Front* forward in its triumphant stride. But it would be uncharitable to strip Milestone of all honour, and churlish to deny his achievement. He has done what many other American directors could not have done. Whatever its faults, he has made a remarkable film out of a difficult subject. He has put the War on the screen better than any other American director has done. He has been sincere in his effort, and that is sufficient in itself to deserve acknowledgment.

The two most important factors, therefore, arising out of Milestone's direction, are his introduction of good cutting into the scenes of attack, and his clever appreciation of the value of suspense in the German trench prior to the first French attack and in the final scene of Paul's death. These qualities do more to raise Milestone in my estimation than his handling of the scenes in which the " acting " takes precedence over cinematic treatment, as for example the opening sequences, the shell-hole incident and Paul's going on leave. In his arrangement of the French attack there is nothing between Milestone and cinema save the raw material of mass-movement, shells bursting and a machine-gun, whereas in other portions of the film we have always to reckon upon the " acting " abilities of Lewis Ayres, Louis Wolheim and the others of the cast.

From a long shot over the battered waste of no-man's-land, into that far distance of shells and smoke from which the French will emerge, we travel over the heads of the Germans and see every man waiting, rifle to shoulder, eyes glued to the sights. Suspense. The sound volume increases as the French burst through the smoke. We track over their heads. We cut to the German line. They are still waiting. A machine-gun is trained on the approaching attack. Backwards and forwards: French and German. Suspense. Suddenly the German line opens fire. From behind a machine-gun we see its sweeping curve of death. We cut to a pan shot of the French, we take the place of the swivelling gun, we follow its spreading hail of bullets from left to right across the screen. We return for a moment to the overhead tracking shot

American Universal

All Quiet on the Western Front

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Lewis [illegible]
USA 12-0
Class: [illegible] [illegible]

up the line, then to the machine-guns, then to the French.

Milestone's timing of shot-lengths and continuation of movement from one shot to another could not be better. The whole arrangement has been most intelligently thought out with scientific accuracy. Each shot fits into the next to build a sequence that assails our senses. When later in the film we see another attack, this time issuing from the German lines, the pan movement is reversed and we follow the spread of the bullets from right to left. Quite unconsciously to the audience but definitely calculated by Milestone, the conflict between the two sides is expressed by the movement of the camera. It may appear a small detail, but it is vastly efficacious in establishing the French and German enmity.[1]

As in *Tell England*, this is cutting as cutting should be used, to storm and stagger us as we sit in the cinema. It is an exciting type of cutting to express an exciting incident; just as slower and longer arrangements of shot-lengths arouse our more tragic senses, modulating between the physically exciting and the psychologically dramatic. We experience this latter mood to the full in the scene of Paul's death, which has already been described. As in the attack the pieces of celluloid are cut short with the material in motion, here Milestone cuts into long, measured lengths, his material at rest, to bring out the whole tragedy of the boy's abrupt death. And in both cases he introduces sound as a powerful adjunct to the visual images.

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[1] This particular method of cutting on movement is, I observe, used with great skill in *The Front Page*, a film that does much to raise Milestone in my estimation and that removes certain of the doubts expressed by the above remarks, which were written, of course, before the exhibition of this last picture.

Although Milestone has a certain flair for selecting good camera angles, he has not the unerring instinct, such as Pabst possesses, for choosing precisely the right set-up to bring out the mood of the scene. This is noticeable in the shots of the French sniper during the final scene of Paul's death. I can convey my point best, perhaps, by drawing a comparison between this scene and that wherein Bair shoots a fox in the opening sequence of Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia*. The infinite pains taken by Bair to ensure that his bullet will not miss are almost identical with those of the French sniper as he takes aim at Paul. But Pudovkin's approach with his camera to Bair, and the perfection of each angle as he photographs him from every side, is far more emphatic than Milestone's rather carelessly chosen angles on the French sniper. Pudovkin is scientific in his selection, whereas Milestone (in this particular instance) is unscientific and without method. There are, however, some moments in *All Quiet on the Western Front* when Milestone selects well, as in the shots taken from below of the Frenchmen leaping over the shell-hole in which Paul is sheltering, and in the shots of the galloping gun-teams in the village street towards the beginning of the picture. It is such unevenness in the quality of the direction that causes me to rate Milestone only as a very efficient director, and not as the genius that Universal consider him to be.

Of the " acting," such as it is, little need be said except that it conforms with customary American standards. Lewis Ayres makes a restrained performance of Paul Baumer, Louis Wolheim portrays the redoubtable Katczinsky with notable skill, John Wray overacts the tyranny of Himmelstross, whilst the others are all more or less adequate. I would only add that there seems no conceivable reason for substituting at the last moment Beryl Mercer for Zasu Pitts as Paul's mother. The difference between these two actresses is so great that it is hardly credible that Zasu Pitts was forsaken in favour of Beryl Mercer.

The very size and scope of *All Quiet on the Western Front*—they say it cost something in the neighbourhood of four hundred thousand pounds—cause it to project among the films of 1930. Not that its magnitude need alarm us. On the contrary, the bigger the picture the more futile and cumbersome it usually turns out to be. But Milestone's job assumes vast dimensions when we consider the amount of material he had at his disposal. No matter what any serious critic may say, the film is destined to go down to posterity as a true and faithful record of the War. The publicity department of Universal Pictures has made certain of that. Copies of the picture have been accepted by the corporations and councils of various cities throughout England to be stored away in their vaults as a historic record of the World War. It has been awarded the gold medal of artistic honour by the Faculty of Arts as being, in the opinion of that resplendent body, the best film to be produced in 1930. I cannot but wonder whether the judges of this institution happened to see a film called *Earth*, a peaceful work without noise or publicity. At all events, whatever we may say of it, *All Quiet on the Western Front* has been acknowledged the handiwork of genius and the masterpiece of the century. Who are we to deny that?

EARTH

Directed by Alexander Dovjenko

(Produced by the Vufku-Kino, Kiev, U.S.S.R., 1930)

Since the films produced in the Soviet Union have become the playthings of the boys and girls of London's smart set, to say nothing of the denizens of Bloomsbury, Chelsea and Hampstead, it is fashionable to argue both for and against the Russian cinema. When, on the one hand, a hoary-minded critic denounces the films of Russia as one and all hysterical subversive propaganda which incite ordinary men and women to raze the Houses of Parliament to the ground; and when, on the other, a youthful enthusiast, carried away by his emotions, claims every Soviet film to be a masterpiece of cinematic art, we may well conceal a smile and go to see for ourselves what all the trouble is about.

By now it is generally recognized, I think, that the film industry of Russia is entirely State-controlled, and that any production launched in the studios or on location in the Soviet Union has as its primary object the dissemination of Communist propaganda. Whether it is made for home consumption by the peasants and workers or whether it is intended for export in the hope of attracting fresh converts to the red banner, the Soviet film has propaganda as its life and breath. Once this is grasped and assessed according to our personal attitude, we can proceed to acknowledge that the Russian cinema as a whole is one of the most, if not the most important contribution to world cinema. I have explained elsewhere at some length just how much the technical achievements of such cinematographers as Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Kuleshov and their colleagues have meant, how the scientific principles of the Soviet constructivist cinema have arisen, and how certain of the better films have succeeded in approaching nearer to the ideal film than any produced in Western Europe and America.[1]

If the position were as simple as I have described all would be well and there would be no reason for clashes of opinion. But unfortunately the complications attending the presentation of Soviet films outside their country of origin are various, and nowhere have they reached a more preposterous stage than in England.

The factors contributing to this tangled situation are many. In the first place, Russian pictures are generally considered by the film trade to have no commercial value, and hence bookings for them at ordinary cinemas are few and far between, more especially since the advent of the talking film. Secondly, a certain section of movie writers has been at pains to praise all the products of the Soviet cinema without any discrimination between the good and the bad, with the result that many students of the cinema, who have been unable to judge for themselves, have placed a much greater value on the general methods of Russian production than was necessary. Thirdly, owing to this legend of the unvarying greatness of Soviet films, the growing film society movement throughout the country has demanded to see the so-called masterpieces, and has as a consequence met with opposition from local watch-committees, magistrates or council authorities, who on their side have been guided by staunch ideas of Victorian patriotism and a reasonable distaste for Communist beliefs. Fourthly, the Russians themselves, not slow to turn the position to their own advantage, have by devious methods introduced many of their films into London, and have indirectly encouraged the setting up of film societies in big industrial centres where these pictures, under the guise of artistry, were likely to have the most effect on working class audiences. Were the circumstances to be examined, it would probably be found that the rental cost of Russian pictures to societies in such fruitful neighbourhoods is much lower than it is to the more select societies which profess a serious interest in cinematic art. This, briefly, is the state of affairs that is encountered every time we, who are serious, may wish to see a new Soviet film. To add to the conflagration, the lay Press considers that the matter has quite a notable news value, and it is common to find voluminous correspondence on the pros and cons of Russian films in our daily newspaper.

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[1] *Vide* the chapter on Soviet films in " The Film Till Now."

Under such conditions it is inevitable that the sheep should suffer with the goats, and that to see such a remarkable piece of work as Dovjenko's *Earth*, one must either join a film society or journey to some remote part of London, where a cinema exhibitor has possibly booked the picture at random or has been influenced by the chance of a little free publicity. To convey my point, I would mention that of the several times which I have seen *Earth*, certainly the most curious was at a small theatre in the east of London, in a district that can hardly be described as attractive, and where at least two-thirds of the audience was composed of people who had come from the West End to see this film by Dovjenko, about which they had read.

I have been at pains to stress the difficulties surrounding the presentation of Soviet films in England in general, and the difficulty of seeing *Earth* in particular, because without having seen portions of Dovjenko's film it is impossible for anyone to come to a full realization of what contemporary cinema can mean. If it were as easily possible for the vast general public to see *Earth* as it is for it to waste hard-gotten money on *Whoopee*, *Resurrection* and *Kismet*, there would be no cause for discontent. But the position remains that whereas *Whoopees* and *Charley's Aunts* are as thick as the pebbles on the beach, such a film as *Earth* happens only on the rarest occasions and then is hidden away out of all reasonable reach.

With Room's *Ghost That Never Returns,* and Trauberg's *The Blue Express*, Dovjenko's *Earth* is presumably one of the last of Russia's contributions to the silent cinema before the Soviets turn their attention to the problems of the sound film. It is all the more interesting, moreover, because Dovjenko's method of working provides a sharp contrast to those of the more exhibitionist directors of the left-wing. *Earth* affords an excellent comparison between the violent, feverish styles of Pudovkin and Eisenstein and the peaceful, slow, yet strongly dramatic style of Dovjenko.

Not only this but *Earth*, as well as the earlier work of the same director, marks a fresh outlook in Soviet production, for it attempts the philosophical rather than the sociological or political thematic content. Whilst the subject-matter deals to a certain extent with the contemporary Soviet problem of the adoption of collective farming, as did *The General Line,* the real intent of *Earth* is the cinematic representation of nature and the expression of a new attitude towards birth, life and death, set in an environment of extreme natural beauty. The age-old theme of the supremacy of the new over the old, the Soviet methods overthrowing the ancient privileges of the Kulaki (the rich farmers), and the superiority of the machine over the animal, these are all present, but they are subservient to Dovjenko's beautiful rendering of nature and ingenuousness of the peasant mind. A crude form of propaganda is overcome by a visionistic outlook—an outlook that seeks to express the richness and materialism of life. There is nothing glorifying in the coming of the tractor in *Earth,* rather does Dovjenko evoke our sympathy and love for the graceful horses and milk-white oxen whose tasks are now at an end. *Earth* gives us something new in cinema, something which —although slightly similar in technical methods of approach—is a thousand removes distant from the revolutions of an Eisenstein and a Pudovkin, or the shuttlecock activities of a Dziga-Vertov.

The slight narrative interest which Dovjenko has written for the theme of *Earth* is remarkable for its simplicity, since any complexity of plot would have impaired the main purpose of the interpretation of nature. In a small village in the Ukraine, the peasants and Kulaki are quarrelling. The youth of the peasants seek to further the setting up of communal farms while the youth of the Kulaki seek to protect the land which is theirs by ancient privilege and right to possession. The fathers of both, rich in experience of toil, watch on, mistrusting the new inventions and at the same time jealous of each other. A tractor is sent by the Government, and Vassily, a young peasant, brings it in triumph into the village. In his joy he drives it across the lands of a Kulak, as the result of which he is shot by Thomas, a Kulak's son, as he returns to his home in the quiet of the night. At the urge of his father, Vassily is buried by his friends, not with the customary ceremonies of religion, but with the spirit of the new faith, with fruit and songs and joyous belief in this new philosophy; whilst Thomas, his murderer, admits his guilt, but is ignored by the singing peasants. That is all.

A calm, slow, measured development distinguishes the opening sequence as Dovjenko gradually absorbs us into his mood. Great expanses of corn and wheat ripple in the wind. There is fruit on the trees, great clusters of apples and pears. We are aware of the luxuriant fertility of the soil, of the sun that ripens and the rain that softens. There are smiling faces, sunflowers, and happiness. Amid banks of fruit, surrounded by his son and grandson and great-grandson, an old man lies dying. For many years he has toiled and lived on the fruits of his toil. Death does not mean much to these men of the land. Life takes its natural course. This death is but an incident in the life of something greater. The old man eats an apple, and as he does so his eyes wander to a child eating an apple also. The beginning and the end, all is the same with the fruit of the soil. All his life this old man has worked, and he has received no medal for it. Medals are only given by the new collective farm, and he is too late for that. An interchange of words brings out the primitive beliefs of these peasants. " Send me word, Peter, what heaven or hell is like." The old man smiles with happiness and quietly sinks back into death. The whole sequence has been peaceful, marked out by shots held on the screen for a considerable length of time, leisurely and with little movement.

Suddenly we come to the heads of laughing women, to uproarious mirth, blatant and ugly. The cutting quickens with the rise in mood. The women are jeering at the rich Kulak. He is the laughing stock of the village. He resents the overtures of the communal farm. Then we shift to the peasant's house, where the son, Vassily, is trying to convince his father of the need for the communal farm, of which the father is both suspicious and resentful.

Down a long dusty track stretching over the fields, we await the coming of the tractor. The young men have gone out to bring it into the village. The whole landscape seems to be waiting. Grouped in positions of vantage are the peasants, waiting to see for the first time this marvellous machine of which they have heard so much. Even the horses and the cattle are assembled, curious to see their successor make its triumphal entry into the village. The grouping of these shots, each related to the next, is magnificent. A single white cow, two great oxen, a man between two horses; one man, two men, three men, standing quite motionless against a sky that is almost black; photographed from below in dramatic perspective. A row of horses' heads, three Kulaks, a single white sleek-flanked mare. Shots arranged in deliberate progression, compositions of superb beauty, expressing anticipation of the sight of the tractor.

Far along the road, the machine has broken down, the radiator is empty. At the headquarters of the communal farm they do not believe it. A tractor cannot break down. Backwards and forwards we flash from head to head, split up with titles, " It's coming! " " It's stopped! " By their own resource, the peasants refill the radiator and Vassily drives into the village, followed by a cheering crowd. Men look at the tractor and exclaim with surprise, " It's real! "

We follow to a swift sequence of harvesting. Vassily, delighted with the efficiency of his new love, waves to his father, who is scything away as he has done season after season. " Throw away that old broomstick of yours, Dad." The cutting quickens as we watch the girls binding and stacking, until the whole screen is vibrating with movement. Corn, grain, flour; moving here, there, everywhere. A frenzy of speed and achievement.

Soviet *Vufku*

EARTH

Then quietness again as evening draws on. Rest and peace descend after the labour of the day. Shadows grow long across the screen. It becomes difficult to see. Layers of creeping mist circle over a pool of water. Groups of men and women stand together, holding hands in the cool of the evening. Supreme in safety, a girl leans her head against her lover's breast. Fingers are entwined with fingers, rough with the touch of corn-stalks. There is perfect stillness in the dusk. Away in the distance, the Kulak's son is reeling home, dancing drunkenly from side to side of the road. A neighbour follows and tells him that the tractor has been driven across his fields. Elsewhere, Vassily is returning to the village, his heart filled with joy at the success of his day. It is now almost dark and deathly silent. A horse grazes in the dew-strewn grass. Vassily stops and wonders as his soul is filled with the greatness of life. Gradually he begins to dance, gently at first and then quickly, movements of joy and happiness. Faster and faster he twirls in the dusty cloud at his feet, advancing step by step up the winding white road. The camera retreats before him as he throws his whole heart into this dance of passionate joy, until he comes near the lights in the village. Suddenly, at the height of his movement, he drops flat in the dust. The startled horse lifts its head. Vassily lies dead.

The father is stricken with grief. He shouts to the four winds across the expanse of the fields, " Who has killed my Vassily? " A priest comes to his house but is refused admittance. Instead, the father goes to the communal farm and asks that his son may be buried in a manner befitting the new spirit, with songs and hymns to the future instead of with the mockeries of religious pomp. The funeral takes place and Vassily's friend addresses the crowd. A branch of leaves sweeps across the calm face of the dead boy. Thomas can keep his secret no longer, and running across the fields, looks down on the people. He clutches at the ground, buries his hands in the earth—his earth by hereditary possession. He shrieks to the crowd that he killed their Vassily—in the night—but they take no notice. He is puzzled and angry, and he shouts. But the peasants are too occupied with their singing to listen to him. He screams with dismay, dances the dance of a madman, buries his face in the bare soil. Until finally the film closes with a beautiful series of shots of fruit splashed with rain, and the gradual breaking through of the sun. A cluster of apples, three apples, two apples, one apple filling the screen.

So moved am I by Dovjenko's film that I find it difficult to express in words the full meaning of the moving images that are at once lovely in themselves, lovely in sequence, and lovely as a unified work of art. So well has Dovjenko welded his separate images into a single, vibrating, immensely powerful whole, that it is almost sacrilegious to probe and dissect its construction. The images sweeping from cloud to earth, from fruit to sunflower, from graceful steeds to sturdy oxen, from small figures of men on the distant horizon to great close ups of heads, are so beautifully arranged that they defy literary description. The gradual changing of mood from silent calm to noisy excitement, from sun to wind and rain, is so skilfully effected that we are unconscious of the means employed. The touches of mysticism, the deep feeling of soil, the sensitivity to all that is lovely, are so new to the art of the cinema that for the moment we are dumbfounded. We are left with our minds satiated with pleasure, with a curious wonderment as to the birth and origin of what we have just seen.

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Alexander Dovjenko is, or was, a painter, and his arrangement of pictorial composition and extremely delicate sense of beauty is apparent not only in *Earth* but in his earlier work. Both *Zvenigora* and *Arsenal,* the former a queer mystical fantasy of the changing ideas and strong belief in folk-lore in an Ukrainian village, and the latter an account of revolution in the Ukraine, revealed Dovjenko as one of the most interesting of the Soviet directors. In these two films his technical ability was not sufficiently developed to do justice to his breadth of vision, and, although fascinating by reason of their unique conception and use of contrasted static and moving images, they did not reach the high level attained by *Earth*. But despite their uneven qualities, they sufficed to show that Dovjenko would very soon develop into a cinematographer of exceptional genius, an expectation that has now been more than fulfilled in *Earth*.

An intense interest in the life and customs of the Ukrainian people is strongly indicated in all these three films, so much so that portions of *Zvenigora* which dealt with local poetic legend and traditional customs were quite incomprehensible, not only to Western audiences, but to people in other parts of Russia. In *Earth* we see this characteristic brought out in the old man listening at the grave of Peter for word of what heaven and hell are like, and in the particular stress laid on dancing—the drunken dance of Thomas, the wonderful death-dance of Vassily, and the final frenzied dance of Thomas when he refuses to part with his lands. Moreover, throughout the film we can perceive Dovjenko's peculiar understanding of local types, mentalities and superstitions, a quality that is not to be found in the work of other Soviet directors, but which is linked up with René Clair's appreciation of human weaknesses, Chaplin's sensitivity to pathos, Griffith's feeling for intimate sentiments, and Seaström's tendency towards poetical lyricism.

Projecting through the beauty of the theme, the new spirit of Russian youth is thrown into relief against the traditions of the older generation. In the Soviet Union to-day, it is the young rising generation which is being systematically schooled into a new form of life as laid down by Lenin. The elders are being left to finish their days in comparative peace so long as they outwardly conform to Soviet doctrines, but the young men and women are being rigorously trained to their tractors and collective farms. This new attitude is expressed throughout *Earth*, in the gaiety and enthusiasm of Vassily and his friends, in their delight for the tractor and in their ruthless devotion to the interests of the communal farm. Set against this, we have the older generation typified by Vassily's father, at first dubious of his son's keenness for the new methods, but converted to the new way of thinking by Vassily's death, and the still older generation in Vassily's grandfather, who dies at the opening of the picture. Dovjenko has chosen these types as being representative of the transition that is taking place to-day, together with the tractor as symbol of the machine that is the god of modern Russia. These are the bones to carry the main drive of the film.

I have already made clear the wonderful poetic quality of Dovjenko's work, so implicit in the grassy hillside slopes of *Zvenigora*, and even greater in the many magnificent shots of fruit and foliage, animals and landscape in *Earth*, and I repeat that as far as I am aware nothing quite like it has been achieved before on the screen. In my experience, there are few directors who are capable of taking such a fundamental and universal theme as *Earth*, expressing it in terms of visual images on the screen, and translating the poetry of fruit and flowers into cinematic images, as Dovjenko has done, without becoming sentimental. Such a work demands delicacy and restraint of direction, qualities that are most characteristic of Dovjenko's style. In every portion of the film, whether the mood is one of excitement or one of sadness, this admirable restraint carries the theme across with a high degree of emotion. Added to which, Dovjenko maintains a very firm hold over all his material—scenario, photography and editing. This is evidenced in the exactitude with which each shot and each sequence plays its part in the make up of the whole. Had he relaxed control for one moment, the intimacy with nature that dominates the film would have been lost. Moreover, the restrained key in which so much of the picture is played greatly amplifies the more exciting moods. This is especially noticeable during the first reel, when, after the long, leisured sequence in which old Peter lies dying, Dovjenko abruptly switches to the heads of the laughing women. It is such modulation of mood that goes to the making of a great film.

The artist's mind of Dovjenko, thinking in terms of lovely pictorial compositions with the material on the screen at rest, is apparent in the entire length of *Earth*. He has a strong tendency towards building up mood with a series of static shots—approaching the crescendo of a sequence by increasing the grouping value of the screen material—that establishes his painter's outlook. I have referred earlier to the powerful effect of this method of assembling, in the scene in which the peasants and the animals are awaiting the arrival of the tractor, and we find it employed again in other parts of the picture. In the same manner, the beautiful sequence of the falling of dusk and the gradual creation of the peace and quiet of the hot evening in the village is achieved almost entirely by a slow procession of static shots, each matched perfectly with the other in grouping and intensity of light. From this description, it may perhaps seem that the artist's outlook of Dovjenko would tend to isolate the images, as in Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. But happily Dovjenko is able to think also in terms of cinema, that is to say, in terms of constant movement of the celluloid as well as movement of the material being photographed, with the consequence that his work is doubly effective. As I think correct, his shots rely equally on their compositional value and their time-length for the full expression of their content. This question of the artist's static outlook and its relationship to the cinematic outlook of the film director is worthy of considerable thought, and should produce interesting revelations.

By this emphasis on Dovjenko's use of the static image, I do not imply that he eliminates movement of the screen material altogether, for that would be absurd. On the contrary, when desirous of employing movement other than that of the celluloid and of the camera, Dovjenko's matching up and intermixing of rhythms is admirable. No better example of screen movement could be instanced than that of the gradually increasing tempo of the gathering of the harvest, the binding, the stacking, the sifting, the dough-kneading, and finally the baking of the bread, the movement being so speeded up that at the finale the whole screen is rocking with energy.

If fault be found with *Earth* at all, I think it lies in the funeral scenes of the last reel. To me these do not reach the beauty or the power of the preceding reels, firstly because they are not conceived in such measured terms of relationship between images and editing as the rest of the film, and secondly because their photographic value does not achieve the same standard as that of the earlier scenes. To make a comparison, I prefer the famous religious procession in *The General Line*, an episode which admittedly marks the height of Eisenstein's work to date, but which nevertheless has a certain affinity to the procession in *Earth*. Whereas in the former film, Eisenstein collected a hundred small movements of both intellectual and physiological significance into one magnificent whole for the expression of the futility of religious belief in the face of nature, Dovjenko in *Earth* conflicts a simple moving mass of people with the isolated figure of Thomas running against the horizon. Eisenstein gathered every thread of his argument and so cleverly interplaited them that, with the aid of brilliant rhythmic cutting, the emotional effect of the scene was tremendous. But in my opinion, Dovjenko loses the threads of his theme, as well as his photographic excellence, and were it not for the sudden compelling madness of the Kulak's son and his remarkable dance, this sequence of Vassily's funeral would be a blemish on the film.

Despite the simplicity of the story, I found that the continuity and consequential development of the incidents—especially in the earlier portions—is a little difficult to follow. Whether this is because the film is primarily intended for Russian audiences, or whether it is due to my lack of knowledge of Ukrainian legend, I am not sure, but there are certain points of narrative interest which were not clear until I had seen the picture for a second time. I would add, also, that the priest's visit to Vassily's home seemed poor in dramatic quality and might well have been eliminated except, of course, that it served as anti-religious propaganda.

Some comment should be made on Dovjenko's selection of acting material, for like other of the Soviet naturalistic directors, he disapproves of the use of professional actors and actresses. He is consistent in his employment of actors chosen for their type from the ordinary people, and I am given to understand that he believes every person is capable of playing at least one part for the screen—that of his or her individual character. To contradict this, however, I note that the actor Nicolas Nademski plays both in *Earth* and in *Zvenigora*, his performance in the latter being distinguished by his clever make-up as an old man, an artificiality that surely opposes the creed of naturalism?

These remarks on Dovjenko as a film director would be incomplete if I neglected to stress his wonderful ability to create mood by the relationship of visual images. No words of mine can describe the amazing spirit of youth and vigour with which he contrives to imbue the scenes of Vassily and the tractor. I am unable to express the gaiety with which he surrounds the girls as they bind the corn, any more than I can capture the magic of the fruit scenes with their sun and rain or the rising mists from the river. Perhaps it is because Dovjenko is seeing with an artist's mind and setting down the truth of what he sees aloof from any false ideas of entertainment value. Perhaps it is because of his passionate love for the soil, for the fertility and for the beauty of his native Ukraine. Perhaps it is because his marvellous rhythm of emotions runs through man, beast, and land alike. Perhaps because he combines the inspiration of a poet with a rare genius for photography. Whatever hidden quality it may be, there can be no question that Dovjenko takes his place beside the creative geniuses of the film. Even in such a prolific medium as the cinema it is seldom we see such an emotional and well-made film as *Earth*, especially one with such a perfect blending of creative impulse, technical accomplishment and rich pictorial value. From this point of view *Earth* is unique.

In the Soviet cinema as we can regard it from England, Dovjenko projects as an isolated figure quite alien to the main flow of cinematography headed by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. His poetic outlook and his love of mysticism set him apart from the formalist school, with its sole interest in technical problems. The simple technique employed by Dovjenko—and it is remarkably simple when compared with the complex montage principles of Eisenstein—is merely a means to an end and not an end in itself. It is perhaps possible that Dovjenko is an indication of a new type of film mentality in Russia, a development from the new peasant classes that are in the process of formation to-day.

It would be unfair, perhaps, to compare Dovjenko's film with other pictures being shown in London about the same time, and yet we are so accustomed to indifferent films that when something worth while is seen the reaction is remarkable. If we compare *Earth* with such films as *Scandal Sheet, Body and Soul* and *The Criminal Code*, we will learn just how negligible the ordinary run of movies is, and how great true vision and feeling in the cinema can be. In addition to which, *Earth* probably cost about a quarter of the sum expended on any of these American programme pictures. To this there is the obvious reply, of course, that *Earth* was not made for financial reasons, whereas such a film as *Body and Soul* was mainly produced on account of its money-making capacity. But to the believer in real cinema, Dovjenko's film offers an immensity of feeling, a sensitivity to the progress of life, a susceptibility to heaven and earth and nature, an expression of the building of a new country, in place of an artificial story performed within the limits of a cast-iron studio by made-up actors and actresses who by their ill-assumed sophistication merely succeed in being vulgar. *Earth* is one of the few films in the cinema up till now which mean something.

CIMARRON

Directed by Wesley Ruggles

(Produced by Radio Pictures, Hollywood, U.S.A., 1930)

THE gigantic sweep of the American cinema to-day, embracing every conceivable type of story, has sprung with logical development through the course of years from two distinct (yet curiously related) sources of origin—the Slapstick and the Western. Years before sex-appeal was thought entertaining or gangsters considered heroes, before Sternberg became clever or Lubitsch went to America, the cinema was seriously concerned with stories of fat men who batted each other over the head and lean cowboys who were in a constant state of riding to the rescue at the critical moment. Strange though it may seem to the sophisticated filmgoer of to-day, crude as these films were, they contained the main essentials of what we have come to call the science of cinematography.

What mattered to Mack Sennett and the anonymous makers of the Westerns was action—whether of horses, railway trains, motor-cars or simply of Kops chasing a comedian. Speed was the be-all and end-all of the cinema even up till the coming of dialogue, before literary speech was introduced to stultify action. Many of these early films of pace were extremely well cut, not because their editors were aware of any principles of short or long cutting, but because they cut purely in terms of movement. In addition to which, these primitives presented the opportunity for showing the space and limitless horizons which have always been familiar to the American mind.

Westerns continued to be made even when sex-plots and living-in-sin stories occupied the minds of progressive producers, and because America was dealing with sentiments and social levels about which it knew all there was to know, the Westerns were on the whole very well made and extremely popular. But not until 1923, when Paramount conceived the idea of making *The Covered Wagon* on a big scale and James Cruze turned it into the first American epic Western, did the American producers realize what a strong appeal real material had for the filmgoing public. I have explained elsewhere how Cruze's film started the ball rolling for boy-and-girl romances set against a natural background, and I would augment this by drawing attention to the successful revival of the Western during the last few years.

It would have been supposed that the success attending Cruze's *The Covered Wagon* would have led Paramount to continue with the production of these pioneer films, but at that time it was deemed essential for American pictures to deal with subject-matter of universal consequence, in which category the stories of the Great West did not fall. Their national interest for the American citizen was not reckoned sufficiently remunerative to warrant their production on a large scale. With the coming of the talking film, however, this barrier was removed, and the Americans, obliged to concentrate on retaining a firm hold on their own market, have returned to the conquering of the wilderness of the West as a certain attraction to the patriotic American citizen and his excelsior ideology.

Practically every American company has recently made a point of including at least two or three Westerns on a spectacular scale in its schedule. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer brought out King Vidor's *Billie the Kid*, a romanticized and rather dull version of that famous outlaw's life; and a semi-historical picture, *The Great Meadow,* based on the Elizabeth Madox Roberts novel of the settlement in Kentucky in the time of Daniel Boone, when the Indian menace added still further dangers to the exploits of the early pioneers. Paramount have made a long string of such films, beginning with *The Virginian* (still to my mind the best of its kind) and continuing with rather inferior copies like *The Texan, Gun Smoke, The Conquering Horde, Light of the Western Stars* and *Fighting Caravans*, the latter telling the story of the great treks made from the East to the West to carry provisions to the new settlers in California. From Fox there have come *The Big Trail* and its companion picture, *The Sante Fé Trail*, both produced on an enormous but uninspiring sensational scale; while others, like *Shadow Ranch* and *The Lone Rider*, less epic in aim and more reminiscent of the original Westerns, have issued from smaller companies. All these films, whether good or bad, have been greatly enhanced by the natural advantages of sound—by hoof-beats and gun-shots and the cries of cattle. Sound has given new life to the primitive Western.

Although I do not think any of these pictures has wholly recaptured the pace or spirit of the early Westerns, yet they are to be welcomed because at least they bring to the screen the beauty of American landscape with its spacious vistas and sunlight. At heart, these films are incidental propaganda for America's resources and courageous enterprise. They are based on the very toughness and primeval spirit of fight and adventure that crop up in American city-life to-day. They are for the most part distinguished by a sincerity of expression which singles them out from more sophisticated products and which makes them peculiarly attractive. Despite the inclusion of stars, they strive after an elemental roughness which makes them good cinema, and the pace demanded by their action is inducive of good technical construction. To me, at any rate, the Western is America's greatest gift to the cinema.

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It is typical of the American cinema in both its phases, sound and silent, that one film should appear isolated from a mass of others all dealing with a similar trend of subject, and that this film, if it is not the leader, should arrive on the very peak of popularity for this type of picture. In the case of the Western, this has been fulfilled firstly by *The Covered Wagon,* secondly by *The Virginian*, while thirdly, at the height of the craze for pioneer films, there comes *Cimarron*, a giant among giants, a film which despite its many glaring faults stands head and shoulders above its fellow-pictures.

For the story of *Cimarron*, Edna Ferber, the author of the novel from which the film is adapted, took one of the most romantic incidents in American history—the throwing open to settlers of the barren territory that was destined within a few years to become the flourishing state of Oklahoma. As her hero, she chose Yancey Cravat, a poet, a lawyer, an editor—a fighter with Indian blood in his veins who could at will quote Milton. For her heroine, there is Sabra Cravat, the courageous, loyal, conventional wife of Yancey. And for a background, the terrific rise of the city of Osage, a composite name for many Oklahoma cities—amongst them being Pawhuska, Tulsa, Guthrie, Muskogee, Pawnee, Ponca City and Omulgee.

It is noon of April 22nd, 1889. Thousands upon thousands of men, women and children are gathered beneath the blazing sun on a square of clay desert, astride their horses, ponies, mules, donkeys, cattle—sitting on carts, buggies, wagons, bicycles, every sort and description of vehicle—waiting in tense excitement for the sound of a rifle-shot which will release them in a storming, raging stampede into the race for their share of the new lands. As far as the camera can reach there are rows and rows of horses and wagons, luggage and bundles, all that each and every man possesses. Amid them rides Yancey, eager to plunge forward in order to seize for his own a certain strip of land, which he has coveted since the time he rode the waste lands of the Cimarron country. Nearby is Dixie Lee, a prostitute, equally bent on securing land for herself. Through the babel of voices there comes the sound of the shot. From every side the pioneers race forward in their fanatical rush. The air is filled with their cries and the sound of roaring wheels. Over, round, below the camera into the audience itself.

Yancey has broken away from the others. As he crosses a deep gully, he is overtaken by Dixie Lee, but in putting her pony to the slope it stumbles and breaks a leg. Yancey helps her up and draws his gun to put the animal out of pain. As he does so, Dixie mounts his own horse and is away to stake the land of which Yancey had dreamed.

Yancey returns home to his wife and paints a vivid description of the adventurous life which lies before them in the new country. That night he sets out by wagon on the long trek to Osage with Sabra, his son and a negro boy. Nine days later they arrive at night in the boom-town—a city of wooden huts arisen in one day—a fairground of prospectors, gunmen, travellers, outlaws, prostitutes—humanity from every corner of the United States hoping to strike lucky in this wave of excitement and progress. Yancey learns that the last editor of Osage has been shot in the back for publishing too much news in his paper, and fired with this opportunity he announces that the first issue of "The Oklahoma Wigwam" will be published within a week, and in it he will print the name of the man who murdered his predecessor.

In the lawlessness of Osage, Sunday is still God's day, although the service may be held in a gambling hall. By popular accord, Yancey is asked to conduct the gathering. Gun on each thigh, he asks for peace and brotherhood from the citizens of Osage. He has a confession to make himself—he is sorry to have withheld the name of the murderer, but—a gun-shot rings out from the back of the tent. Women are screaming, and a rush is made for the exits. But quick as lightning Yancey has replied from both guns, and the outlaw is carried from the tent.

A year creeps by, and a daughter is born to the Cravats. The newspaper is now a flourishing success and the town has come to accept Yancey's journalistic dictatorship. Houses have grown into two storeys and a real church has sprung up. But banditry is still a thriving livelihood. Despite the fact that he has been warned by Yancey to keep clear of Osage, " The Kid," once a friend of Cravat's in the Cimarron country, rides into town and shoots up the main street. To protect his son, Yancey draws on " The Kid," and a fierce duel takes place, until at last, in the light of the setting sun, Yancey shoots down his friend in a hail of shot. Sometime later, there comes the news that the Government has thrown open the Cherokee Strip for settlement, and lusting for fresh adventure, Yancey begs Sabra to break up home and move on. But Sabra, content with what they have achieved, refuses, and Yancey rides out alone.

For five years Sabra controls the paper, steering it on a career of success and profit, but still there comes no news of her husband. Sabra has become the main spirit of respectability in Osage society, and she is on

American *Radio*

Cimarron

the point of conducting a case against Dixie Lee for her alleged impropriety, throwing the whole weight of the paper into persuading the town against the girl. At the critical moment of the trial, Yancey rides into town again, in the uniform of Roosevelt's Rough-riders. As he embraces Sabra, he learns of the trial and immediately goes to the court-house to plead in Dixie Lee's defence. His eloquence and common-sense argument break down the case and Dixie is acquitted. Forgiving yet again, Sabra begins to see in her husband something that is beyond her ordinary understanding.

During nine years Yancey remains in Osage, ruling with a high hand as his principles demand. Oil is discovered in the young city, bringing overnight wealth undreamed to the thriving town. Yancey takes up the cause of the Indians, who had been driven from the North to populate the waste land of Osage, and fights their claims to the bitter end. His work finished, again he is seized with wanderlust, and leaving Sabra he rides away to an unknown destination.

Year by year Osage grows. There are wide streets and high buildings—symbols of achievement. The barren desert has become a throbbing city of wealth. It is 1930. Sabra, still controlling the destiny of "The Oklahoma Wigwam," can look out on to skyscrapers and industry. There has been no news of Yancey for many years. A few old friends still stay near Sabra. This day she is to be elected to the Congress of the United States. She is premier woman of Osage. At luncheon she presents to the congressional party her son, Cimarron, and his Indian wife. Afterwards they make a tour of inspection around the oilfields. A man has been hurt in a sudden burst of oil. He threw himself in the way of an unexploded nitro-torpedo to save hundreds of lives. As it would be simple to imagine, it is Yancey—in time to die in the arms of his wife.

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From this brief outline of the action, it will be seen that the principal fault of *Cimarron* is its unwieldy length and its badly filled lapses of continuity. The film begins on a high note, on a scene of amazing spectacular value which has seldom been equalled on the screen. Both aurally and visually, the handling of the rush for the new lands is well done, with a force that carries the audience straight into the momentum of the film. But as is practically unavoidable in such cases, the action flags when Yancey returns home, and does not recapture its pace until the night arrival in Osage. Here, we are plunged again right into the intrinsic spirit of the rough, elemental quality of the theme. As Yancey's wagon picks its way through the crowded street, stopping here and there to push aside the swirling mob, we are transported for a fleeting moment into the atmosphere which must have been present at the original Osage in 1889. There is a wonderful conviction about this sequence that is hard to analyse and which speaks well for the direction of Wesley Ruggles. It is possible that the reality of the environment is very largely achieved by the clever use of natural sound and the intelligent treatment of the boisterous crowd.

Thereafter the film holds its pace for a while, alternating high-spots like the shooting of Lon Yountis during the church service and the killing of " The Kid," with more sentimental scenes between Sabra and Yancey. Yet from this point onwards, our interest begins to wander as Ruggles slowly loses the main thread of his theme and becomes lamentably entangled in the relationship between Sabra and her husband. Until Yancey's first departure from Sabra, when he rides away to the opening of the Cherokee Strip country, the relentless storming of *Cimarron* catches our breath. We are held by the onrush of the theme, by the dominant personality of Richard Dix as Yancey, and by the fierce reality of the surging background material. We are able to feel the spirit of this growing town and to understand the amazing mixture of humanity that has brought it into being. We are seized with a fervour of excitement for the building of this new state and participate in the achievement of these raw human beings. For the first half of *Cimarron* we are convinced of good cinema, and can swear that this perpetual movement of images and sound and dramatic strength is the movement of real film.

The return to ordinary movie comes gradually, being spread over the sequence when Yancey reappears to play his hero's part in the trial of Dixie Lee. For a moment, perhaps, we still believe that *Cimarron* will end on a great note of drama, that Yancey will leave Sabra for the woman whose virtue he is defending. It is not clear from this scene that Yancey is pleading with such charming eloquence on Dixie's behalf for any other reason than that he loves her, and has loved her ever since the day when she stole his horse and his land at the gully in the great rush. In fact, whatever Edna Ferber's book may have demanded and however it may have destroyed the epic rise of Oklahoma, the story of Yancey Cravat (if this be the aim of the film) should have ended here at his reunion with Dixie Lee. If this had been so, the film would have in some measure retained its unity and have achieved an interesting rhythmic construction.

But the film which Radio Pictures present draws to an anti-climax which may or may not be good publicity for American womanhood, but is, in my opinion, far from being well constructed entertainment. True to Hollywood conventions, the centre of interest of *Cimarron* is the personality of Yancey Cravat, which is superior even to the rise and growth of Oklahoma. We cannot at this stage expect an American entertainment picture to be concerned solely with the presentation of an epic theme, even though that theme be the life-blood of the true American citizen. But Dix plays Yancey with a strong hand, and we are definitely interested in his character up till the moment of the death of "The Kid." After the opening thrill of the land rush, it is the force of Dix and his dominance over Osage that gives impetus to the film. From this high-spot of the duel onward, however, Wesley Ruggles cannot make up his mind which course to pursue to the conclusion. Eventually, after boggling over the Dixie Lee trial, he flings continuity to the winds and does his best to put across Sabra (who so far has been incidental) as the model of the Pioneer

Woman. In other words, he commits the disastrous blunder of abruptly switching over human interest in the middle of his film from the central character to a secondary personality. The result, of course, is a weak, almost futile conclusion to what might have been a great picture.

I can forgive Radio Pictures for ignoring the main issue of *Cimarron* and for making the development of Osage a secondary motif to the personality of Yancey Cravat, because in this they are merely acknowledging the American public's worship of the ego. But I cannot accept this sudden rift in psychology, this sudden concentration on Sabra Cravat being elected to Congress, with poor old Yance dragged in as a mock-hero in the last few shots. It is all too ridiculous and far from convincing.

Moreover, after the brilliant cinematic quality of the first half of *Cimarron*, I complain bitterly at the theatricalism of the concluding scenes, which attempt to attain something that is impossible in the naturalness of the film medium. During the most exciting portions of the picture, we have become attached to the leading characters, to Yancey, Sabra, Jess, Sol Levy, Mrs. Wyatt and all the other delightful persons who are struggling for a living in Osage. We have liked them playing with their proper vitality and, more or less, with their natural physical appearance. Suddenly, in the last continuity lapse of the story, approximately twenty-five years are whisked away, and we behold all our characters—who were comparatively youthful a few minutes previously—aged and positively senile. They have clapped on white wigs and crow's feet and ask us to believe they are twenty-five years older!

Surely this is the sort of make-believe they love in the theatre, this art of growing old by the ingenuity of the make-up man? It certainly has no connection with the cinema of to-day, and I am amazed that such a progressive firm as Radio Pictures should insult present-day audiences by offering a conjuror's trick of this nature. Not that the change in the physical appearance of the players is not well done. On the contrary, Richard Dix assumes a Methuselah-like expression with consummate skill, but it is of no avail, since I have admired him but five minutes before, leaping off a horse with youthful alacrity.

Apart from the time lapse of the characters, Osage grows from a moderate sized town with two-storeyed buildings into a teeming community of skyscrapers and extensive oilfields, and we are shown nothing of it. It were surely inconsistent to take the utmost trouble in staging the spectacular land rush for the opening of *Cimarron*, to make us acquainted with Osage in its first few years, and then to ignore completely its final and most vital phases of development. The continuity lapse between the last departure of Yancey after his fight for the Indian cause and the introduction of Sabra as the woman-editor ensconced in luxurious surroundings, might well have been bridged by showing the growth of Osage itself.

Why, for example, do we see nothing of the first railway to come to Osage? How were the great skyscrapers—which we perceive out of Mrs. Cravat's window—erected? What was the transition stage between them and the crude wooden huts which comprised the boom-town at the beginning of the picture? And is " The Oklahoma Wigwam " still printed by hand at the back of Yancey's office? These are points of unquestionable importance—points which demanded proper inclusion if *Cimarron* is the film which its producers claim it to be.

But Hollywood is satisfied to give its attention to the whitening of Sabra Cravat's hair and to remain blind to the real bones of film material. The terrific drama of the construction of the oilfields is forgotten in the more vital problem as to whether Dix's stubble is the right length. I stress this point especially with regard to *Cimarron* because its production represents the expenditure of a very large sum of money and a considerable amount of talent and time. By their own confession, Radio Pictures " financed the venture in terms of millions," Wesley Ruggles gave " eight months of his time," and the State of Oklahoma " yielded a store of knowledge and suggestion, the value of which can never be computed." Howard Estabrook is one of the finest scenarists in Hollywood. Edward Cronjager has given plentiful evidence of his camera ability. But despite this, *Cimarron* lacked a brain which could visualize it in the terms of an epic film. I am sadly afraid that it will not fulfil its sponsors' claim to be " the most perfect example in screen history of co-ordinated genius and resource." Although it cost millions, employed forty thousand persons, and took over a year to make, *Cimarron* does not achieve a higher status in the level of cinema values than a passing programme feature.

Cimarron has to its credit one dominant factor—the movement of its opening passages. These, together with the shooting of "The Kid," are its principal claims to remembrance. While this pace of material is particularly welcome in these days of static dialogue films, it is, nevertheless, but a shadow of the greatness which *Cimarron* might have possessed had it been the product of real cinematic construction and of a pioneer courage for new ideals in entertainment value. *Cimarron*, like *Trader Horn* and other spectacular gestures, fails because of its producers' loathing to come to hard grips with the real problems of the cinema.

TELL ENGLAND

Directed by Anthony Asquith and Geoffrey Barkas

(*Produced by British Instructional Films Ltd., Welwyn Garden City, England,* 1930)

Since the Armistice was signed we have had, I suppose, several hundreds of films dealing with the World War from one or other of its many-sided aspects. Of them, perhaps a dozen have been produced having profound sincerity and which may be regarded as a true rendering of the greatest conflict of all time, made by men who are familiar with their grim subject.

With the comedies of Chaplin and Keaton in *Shoulder Arms* and *Forward March* on the one side, the spectacular attempts like *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *The Big Parade*, *What Price Glory?*, *Wings* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* on the other, and with a multitude of ordinary feature films such as *Journey's End*, *Suspense*, *Havoc*, *Roses of Picardy* and *Poppies in Flanders* in the centre of the running, the War has been used as a box-office proposition times without number.

In almost every case the War has served its purpose as the background to a story—preferably, of course, a love story—just as Africa is the peg upon which to hang *Trader Horn.* Only on the rarest occasions has the War been considered interesting enough to carry the weight of a film on its own shoulders, and then not as an epic, but as a documentary record like the excellent but seldom-mentioned early British pictures, *The Somme*, *Armageddon*, *Zeebrugge*, *Mons*, and others in the same series. When we come to think of it, these films, together with the well-known *Secrets of Nature* series, are the real tradition of the British film industry, and I know of none that has equalled their merits save perhaps one or two of the German war-record pictures produced about the same time.

It is from these documentary films, with their fine record of reconstructed war events, that *Tell England* has principally sprung, and it is by the actual war scenes of bombardment and attack and hand-to-hand combat that *Tell England* will be remembered in the years to come. If this film has achieved nothing else, at least it tells with startling reality of the terrible tragedy that was Gallipoli and of the utter hopelessness of the War.

For all intents and purposes *Tell England* is the first sincere attempt by a film director to project any of the main war offensives on to the screen in its true proportions and perspective. Not one of the war farces from Elstree, not one of the fictitious war exploits centred round a popular star from Hollywood, not even the bigness of *Hell's Angels*, the thrill of *The Dawn Patrol*, or the noise of *All Quiet on the Western Front* have achieved this aim. None of these films—with the possible exception of the last-named—is fit to be preserved as an individual impression of the War. They have one and all set out to be entertainment, and the War was hardly that. They have been thrilling, exciting and sensational, in some cases intelligent, but they have all to some extent aimed at the box-office, which has meant that truth has been sacrificed in the interests of profit.

Nobody could be more anxious than I that *Tell England* should completely fulfil this heroic aim, that it should be the first real film of the War, and wholly successful as an achievement which should long ago have been Britain's. But although it falls short of this ambitious goal, it approaches nearer to the mark than any of its predecessors. In the same way that the Dardanelles campaign was a great human effort which very nearly triumphed, so *Tell England* is a noble attempt which very nearly succeeds. And if it is any consolation to those concerned in its making, it possesses the merit of being the most interesting British film yet produced in the sphere of theatrical film production.

Particular sentiment attaches to this last independent picture to come from the Welwyn studios of British Instructional Films Ltd., before this gallant firm joined forces with the British International Pictures company at Elstree. In many respects it summarizes their prolonged effort to create an individual, tremendously patriotic production-centre in England, as different in tone and outlook from other companies operating around London as " The Observer " is from " The News of the World." Welwyn may not perhaps have brought forth any pictures of the sensational, vulgar kind, but it has built up a name for frankness and courageous enterprise. In *Tell England* we see the result of this policy, a policy that commercially may not have yielded a rich harvest but which has preserved prestige in the industry as a whole.

Almost any filmgoer of moderate observance could say that *Tell England* issued from the same studios as the *Secrets of Nature*, *Stampede*, *The Windjammer*, *Underground* and *A Cottage on Dartmoor*. Behind its panorama of war lie the flower-gardens and lanes, the public schools and universities of England. It has slightly the flavour of Rupert Brooke, of intellectual æstheticism, and of young men who write slim novels when they come down from Oxford. More than anything else, however, it is typical of the public school tradition, and it is this quality in the picture that kills its story. It is the work of a type of person not often associated with the film industry, and for this reason is not regarded with kindness by the rest of the trade. It is suspected. It is clever. The trade see in it something which they do not understand. They are shy of its spirit and excuse their embarrassment by saying that it is not a box-office picture. That is so typical of Wardour Street.

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Even before it was made it was obvious that *Tell England* could not be a single, unified achievement. By the nature of its story it was inevitable that the finished film would fall between two stools. In truth, it was unwise of its makers to aim at two things, for they were destined to achieve neither.

Primarily this film is a story of the mental conflict between two boys, adapted from Ernest Raymond's popular novel of two public school boys who idolize each other in the class-room and on the playing-field, whose mothers are always beautiful with tired eyes, and who glory in boyish sentimentality before they collide with life. We see them first swimming, full of laughter and boyish spirit, Doe and Ray, and Doe's mother, and then having tea on the lawn with a preciosity that is revolting.

It is the warm spring and early summer of 1914. Taking swimming as the thread of continuity, we see the boys at school, Doe winning the swimming cup for Kensingtowe, and again his mother, looking sadder and softer than before, comes too. Then we fade quickly into the War. The boys have received commissions in the same regiment, still with their schoolboy gusto, and even their colonel is an old Kensingtownian. Later they take part in the Gallipoli operations, and we watch the strain of war gradually overcome their nerves until the smallest incident causes their tempers to fray. Eventually Doe is killed in a brave attempt to silence a Turkish trench mortar, which for weeks has worked havoc in their particular section of the line. Unfortunately the film does not end here, but drags on to a sickly death-bed scene in the field hospital when the boys are reunited, and finally ends with Turkish and German officers inspecting the graves after the Peninsula has been evacuated.

This is all the story to the film, and it betrays the producers at every sequence. It is sweet and gentlemanly, and it lacks strength: its weakness being shown up by the power of the remainder of the film. However skilfully the story of Ray and Doe may have been bound up with the Gallipoli campaign, the two were bound to fall apart.

Broadly speaking, the brilliance of *Tell England* lies in the scenes of the two landings and in Doe's capture of the Turkish trench mortar. The first of the landings takes place when the boys are still in the home country and purports to show the heroic efforts of the Anzacs, whilst the second centres round the famous attack of the 29th Division from the "River Clyde." It is in these terrific spectacles that the combined talent of Geoffrey Barkas, an experienced director of war record films, and Anthony Asquith, an exponent of modern methods of cutting, puts on the screen something which has never been done before.

From the moment we see the great black battleships belching their smoke across a clouded sky, surrounded by launches and pinnaces, the film grips our imagination. Shot succeeds shot with the rapidity of rifle-fire. The shelling of the beaches, the landing of the boats, the manœuvring of the lighters, the dropping troops under a hailstorm of bullets, the struggle up the entrenched hills, the Turkish snipers, the sweeping death-rain of the machine-guns, the hand-to-hand combats in the gullies, the glimmering light on the water, the whimpering of bullets, the shrieking of shrapnel, and the crackling splutter of machine-guns—all this is magnificently taken and assembled in such a manner that it sweeps the audience into the screen by its energy.

Once the Dublin Fusiliers have landed from the

British *British Instructional*

TELL ENGLAND

towed lighters, the remainder of the troops are loosed through specially prepared ports in the side of the " River Clyde " and run across the lighters, which have been brought into position to form gangways between the grounded ship and the shore. From the low, strongly-entrenched hill running round the back of the bay, from a thousand Turkish rifles and machine-guns, a murderous rain of fire sweeps the beach and the lighters. It is said that the Turks fired ten thousand shots a minute during the first few minutes of the landing at " V " beach, and the film gives this impression. No war film yet produced has been more convincing than these scenes of the landings, not even the often-mentioned sequence in Pudovkin's *End of St. Petersburg* or the long tracking shots of the French attack in Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front.*

It is all the more unfortunate that such brilliantly produced scenes should have to be intermixed with a story of such poorness, in fact with a story of any kind. Yet again we who care for the cinema have to submit to the sight of splendid material being pulled down to the depths of bathos by the introduction of story-interest. We saw it in *Hell's Angels*, in *The Dawn Patrol*, and now again in *Tell England.* The situation is always the same. A film which by every recognized standard demands to be made as an epic, standing alone on its heroic material, is dragged down to the level of the ordinary feature picture. *Tell England* should have been the epic of Gallipoli, a great record in the greatest of all dramatic mediums of a campaign such as has never been equalled in bravery and determination, a lasting proof of how British troops achieved the impossible. But it is not to be, for producers tell us that an epic film in the true sense of the word would not pay for the outlay on its production.

Thus, the film *Tell England* might have been one of two things: either the story of Doe and Ray, or the epic of Gallipoli. It succeeds in being neither. It has not the intimacy of mental relationships under strained conditions of a *Journey's End*; nor has it the grand sweeping rhythms and mass movement of a *Battleship "Potemkin."*

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Few critics will deny that Anthony Asquith possesses a very definite flair for manipulating the instruments of the cinema. At the first showing of one of his pictures we experience a certain anticipation, not of seeing anything pre-eminently great, but of witnessing some new angle on cinematic methods which may have arisen from his imagination. At least Asquith is always willing to experiment with new ideas, and he is not afraid of putting his conceptions before the public. With Grierson and his propagandist group in the van of British production, Asquith follows a lonely path, overcoming obstacles and fighting battles with his celluloid. His share in the direction of *Tell England* is far in advance of anything he has as yet done.

As I have remarked before, he has a pleasant sense of pictorial values and decided ideas of how to fill the rectangle of the screen. There are many lovely shots and combinations of shots in *Tell England* that bring a thrill of pleasure to the spectator. Some of the opening images, for example, of Ray and Doe bathing by the weir are beautiful—fair hair and slender limbs and bronze throats photographed from below against a filtered sky. The solemn shots of barbed wire in no-man's-land are immensely impressive. And, again, during the landing scenes there is beauty in the shots of the sparkling Dardanelles, with the black shapes of the lighters floating diagonally across the screen, and in the loosened head of a drowned soldier moving gently to and fro in the lapping waves. This is pictorialism such as is rarely seen in a British film.

But Asquith fails when he is faced with the problem of making his players act. His knowledge of cutting is not sufficient to enable him to dispense altogether with acting, as the Soviets do, neither is his experience of directing actors wide enough for him to tell his story by these means. In consequence, we have the painful performance of Fay Compton, labouring under a theatrical technique, as Mrs. Doe; the curious, frank naturalness of Carl Harbord as Doe; and the stilted, untrained and undirected behaviour of Tony Bruce as Ray—all of which conflict with each other to produce a peculiar, unnatural self-consciousness that will receive hard measure from the average audience. Such experienced and clever actors, on the other hand, as Frederick Lloyd and Denis Hoey evidently took their parts into their own hands and played them irrespective of the direction. But if this film was to have relied on its story, it needed a Gary Cooper, a Jack Holt or a Wallace Beery to give it strength. The limits of Asquith's acquaintance with the many ways in which life is lived greatly diminishes the general appeal of his pictures.

Asquith appears undecided as to which school of British cinema to follow. He has either to concentrate upon cutting and fall in line with the Grierson propagandist movement, or to learn the technique of the stage and thus join the ranks of the Elstree directors. It would seem from *Tell England* that his cutting will develop, if we may judge by the starting of the " River Clyde," which is cleverly cut according to equal lengths of three shots repeated so as to produce a stirring rhythm. Because of his interest in such shot-arrangements, Asquith is inclined to forget the meaning of a sequence, and in turn to lose the driving-power that is essential to the binding of a film into a unity. He still skates lightly over the surface of his scenes and neglects to dive deep into their meaning in order to reproduce their drama on the screen. He does not yet possess enough control over his technical tricks to bend them to the expression of the film's content, as Grierson employs his cutting always to bring out the propaganda of his film. For this reason, I suggest that several portions of *Tell England* demand reorganization, especially the opening and training-camp sequences, whilst in my opinion the whole of the concluding hospital scene could well be deleted. But Asquith has the intelligence and ability and vigour of which the industry in England stands so urgently in need, and it is to be hoped that he will proceed to realize his early promise.

The use of sound throughout in *Tell England* is good, stimulates our minds, and greatly heightens the landing scenes and the capture of the trench mortar. The whine of bullets, the crackle of machine-guns (especially when synchronized to alternate frames of negative and positive), and the maniac laugh of shells are all used to emphasize effect. Of the use of indirect and impressionist sound, as when Mrs. Doe gets all mixed up over her son's departure, I have nothing to say except that it interferes with the simple appeal of the scene. It is significant that those portions of the film in which dialogue is employed are inferior to and less powerful than those in which sound has been added to the pictorial images.

Asquith was fortunate indeed in having the collaboration of such an experienced director as Geoffrey Barkas, who at an earlier date made *The Somme*, *Palaver*, and, with Michael Barringer, *" Q " Ships*. He brought to the making of *Tell England* an indispensable knowledge of filming military and naval manœuvres, and a shrewd idea of how to achieve the best results from unwieldy masses of willing participants. For the part played by the co-operation of the British Fleet in *Tell England* demands the warmest praise, and no directors could have desired better material than that supplied in the form of ships and men by the Admiralty.

It is of no avail to deplore the indiscriminate mixing of the good and the bad material in *Tell England*, for, as I have pointed out many times, it is in the tradition of the film trade to despoil its own work. Nevertheless, it seems surprising that some member of the production unit which brought this picture into being, could not have foreseen that the weak sentimentality of the story would eventually drag down what merits the film as a whole might have; and that the possible excellence of the material taken at Malta would be deprived of its power when blended with the studio material shot at Welwyn Garden City. I find it hard to believe that the affected, mannered " acting " of the principals and their schoolgirlish behaviour can have satisfied the authorities of the producing firm, or can have been considered suitable for inclusion with such material as the landing at the beaches and the shots of the fleet. Nor do I consider it a justifiable action on the part of the directors to have represented the rank and file of the British Army as comic idiots, when their officers are shown as superior-minded young gentlemen performing heroic actions whilst their mamas waited at home. This, more than anything else, shows up the absence of a real driving-power behind *Tell England* and as a result the film wavers from side to side and ends by falling between two stools.

LE MILLION

Directed by René Clair

(*Produced by Films Sonores Tobis-Paris,* 1931)

If the introduction of mechanically-recorded speech and sound into the resources of the cinema has exercised a retrograde influence in some centres of production by sacrificing the pictorial image to the spoken word, on the other hand the use of sound has brought sudden recognition to certain directors whose work previously was familiar only to a restricted few. Just as the possibilities of counterpoint sound and music have realized the very best in Lubitsch, so they have plunged René Clair and his work into an unexpected halo of limelight.

To any critic of the cinema who has watched the development of Clair for several years past, it is diverting to observe the excited childishness of Wardour Street renters and gossip-spilling film writers as they awake to the fact that Clair has been making films since 1922, and that they had never heard of him until a few months ago. It must have come as a serious shock to the big producers when Clair's two sound films startled London, Berlin, New York and Paris, for these wise men of the film trade had no knowledge of Clair except perhaps vaguely as a high-hat director of French comedies. But the scope of sound gave Clair just the fillip for which he had been waiting, and he was clever enough to bring off his experiments in sound technique precisely at the right moment.

Strictly speaking, there is little in the sound of either *Sous les toits de Paris* or *Le Million* which has not been apparent to any intelligent observer of films since sound reproduction became general. There are fresh twists of continuity devices, employing sound as well as the visual image, which have not occurred to American directors and which Clair, along with Wilhelm Thiele and Geza von Bolvary, has exploited with some skill. But in actuality the qualities which are so greatly praised in these two films were equally admirable, if not more so, in some of Clair's earlier work. Yet coming as they did, when dialogue was hanging tooth and nail on to the skirts of film technique, Clair's pictures swept everything before them, and, if I am not much mistaken, the young director finds himself with a difficult reputation up to which he must live.

Le Million has been selected for inclusion among these reviews in preference to *Sous les toits de Paris* not because I consider it the better film—it lacks the simplicity of its predecessor—but because there will be more opportunities for seeing it during the next few months, either in its original version or in some bastard form with irritating strip-titles in English plastered across the images. In the silent days we were annoyed by the indiscriminate cutting of the work of intelligent directors; to-day we are insulted by " dubbed " versions and hybrid English translations.

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The stories of all René Clair's films are of the simplest material, often perhaps a single situation elaborated into a succession of fast-moving incidents. He has learned the value of simple material, of course, from his long study of Chaplin and his beginner's experience of making short one-reel comedies. The plot of *Le Million*, when divested of its complications, may be resolved into the bare facts of a chase after an old coat containing a lottery ticket—a chase which would have been ideal for the purposes of any early Mack Sennett slapstick. But around this simple incident is built up a structure of confusions, counter-chases and complications which add to the swing of the main idea.

Adapted by Clair from a popular French comedy by MM. G. Berr and M. Guillemaud, the story of *Le Million* concerns two young artists, Michel, a painter, and Prosper, a sculptor, who share the same studio in Paris. Michel is engaged to Beatrice, a particularly attractive dancer at the Opéra-Lyrique, but despite the fact that she lives opposite on the same floor, he is in the habit of entertaining other engaging young women. In the middle of one of these receptions, Michel is interrupted by the clamouring of his tradespeople, who at length have lost their patience because he will not pay his bills. They chase him up and down the block of studios, but become entangled with a posse of plain-clothes detectives who are pursuing a thief. Eventually, as Michel is in despair what to do next, Prosper arrives with the news that Michel's ticket in a lottery has won a million francs.

Delighted with such sudden good fortune, Michel invites his creditors up to his studio and they proceed to hold a party. All goes well until Michel tries to find the ticket and recollects having put it in the pocket of an old coat which he had given to Beatrice to mend for him. She, meanwhile, has been surprised by the entry into her room of the thief wanted by the police, and in order to rid herself of his presence, has given him the old coat to replace his own lost in his flight. On hearing this, Michel promises Prosper a share in the prize if he can retrieve the coat, and himself departs for a theatrical costumier's shop where the thief had told Beatrice that the coat might be reclaimed. We now learn that the thief is head of a gang of crooks with concealed headquarters behind the costumier's shop, and a conference of the gang is interrupted by the entrance into the shop of Signor Sopranelli, the tenor of the Opéra-Lyrique, in search of an ancient coat for part of his stage costume. Eventually he buys the one belonging to Michel, who arrives at the shop in time to be arrested on suspicion of theft by the police, for in his hands they discover the watch of the tenor which had been stolen by one of the crooks.

The unfortunate Michel is taken to a police-station, but he is able to impart the news to Prosper that the coat is in the possession of Signor Sopranelli at the Opéra-Lyrique. By good luck, however, the creditors of Michel—who all this time have been making whoopee at his expense—learn of his distress and arrive in a body to bail him out. The action shifts to the Opéra, where there are now gathered all the rival pursuers of the coat—Michel, Prosper, Beatrice, Vanda (Michel's mistress), as well as the whole gang of crooks led by the original thief in disguise. Every device to filch the coat fails, and the chase is continued on to the stage itself in the middle of the first act. Even then the garment eludes capture until in the end—at the last minute of Michel's despair—the ticket turns up in the waistcoat pocket of the crook leader and all ends happily.

From the opening shot gliding over the roofs of Paris and the sound of a striking clock growing louder, reminiscent of *Sous les toits de Paris,* to the final dance of ecstatic joy in Michel's and Prosper's studio, the film moves swiftly forward with a beautiful fluidity. So cleverly is the action arranged and so smooth is the technique that incident succeeds incident with marvellous rapidity and sureness. The continuity of *Le Million* provides as great a contrast to the slow-motion development of most present-day American and British speech films as could be imagined. And when heightened by Clair's abundant wit and delightful sense of humour, the film achieves a value which places it on a level of its own.

The treatment of every sequence compels our attention, not only by its surface humour but by its undercurrent of satire. The scene in the police-station, when Michel is trying to explain the theft of his coat, is a subtle commentary on French law and order. In the background crowd, for example, is a sun-bather, who naturally enough claims any garment for his own, and an unfortunate man who spends the entire sequence in putting on his hat which a gendarme promptly removes. Every scene in which the gangsters appear is a parody of American crime films which defies description. When summoned by their leader to the headquarters of the super-crook organization, the crooks (in bowler hats) arrive through a subterranean passage with the rhythmic precision of a Disney cartoon. At the Opéra, they are dressed in the most amazing collection of misfitting dress-suits, some still with their bowler hats, assuming and discarding moustaches and beards with lightning rapidity. When they pursue the coat on to the stage, they nonchalantly array themselves in the ludicrous dresses of the bandit male chorus.

The whole of the scene in the theatre is a cruel satire on the ridiculous traditions of grand opera. The pride and vanity of Signor Sopranelli, his joy at possessing such a handsome coat, his disdain when the stage-manager suggests that it is not quite what is wanted, and his confusion when he discovers that its sleeves have been dragged out by Michel and Prosper, are too diverting to describe. So also are the incredible rotundity of the prima-donna and the typical Clair touches of the property moon and the falling leaves. On the other hand, Clair can be equally serious, as we see in the charming shots earlier in the film of the ballet rehearsing—shots which vividly bring to mind the paintings of Dégas.

But the real high-spot of the picture—the moment when Clair arouses our greatest admiration—is the chase in the theatre. Michel and Prosper have at last succeeded in stealing the coat, now almost in rags, from the bewildered tenor, and are making a dash for it through the labyrinths at the back of the stage pursued by the crooks and stage-hands, when suddenly a whistle blows and the chase swiftly turns into an American rugby game. Hurtling up the field in a burst of speed, accompanied by a rising tide of cheering, Michel becomes Harold Lloyd or Richard Dix of an American college movie, while the crooks form a scrum in the approved style. This rapid transition from straight humour to brilliant burlesque is so good as to defeat criticism. Alone it stands as Clair's *tour de force*—as the most masterly instance of his ingenuity.

The presence of music, both in the form of songs and as an accompaniment to the action, is of the greatest importance in *Le Million* because Clair is one of the first directors of sound films to appreciate the value of music for emphasis of the visual image. In *Sous les toits de Paris*, he exploited with some success the idea of making music the binding continuity of his visual action, much in the same way as the orchestral score used to be arranged to fit a silent picture. At times, he took this simple method further and made music the binding factor of the screen. Thus, in the famous travelling shot which descended from Pola's attic down the face of the house so that we saw the inmates of each floor in turn as they picked up the theme song, he established a perfect relationship between the camera and the microphone. In *Le Million* this technique is carried still further and the sound performs the duty of a connecting link between each shot and each sequence.

To a certain extent Lubitsch incorporated the music of *Monte Carlo* with the progression of visual images, as in the scene of Jeannette MacDonald and the railway train, yet this was but clever workmanship when compared with Clair's delicate welding together of sound and pictorial image. Behind every sequence of *Le Million* there runs a commentary of music, acting either as a barrier between the screen and silence or coming forward to take part in the screen's expression. As the amusing shopkeepers and concierges follow Michel up and down the flights of stairs in the studio building, they burst into lyrical strains descriptive of their exalted spirits, interpolating a menacing "*Voleur!*" every now and again to remind us of their serious intentions.

Unseen choirs add emphasis to the scrimmage for the elusive coat on the stage, while a super-symphony of Parisian taxi-horns greets pursuers and pursued as they issue from the Opéra-Lyrique. When Signor Sopranelli is buying the famous coat he bursts into vibrating operatics to such an extent that chandeliers crash to the ground and the revolvers of the crooks beat time to his rhythmic oratorio. From the opening revel in Michel's studio to the similar concluding shot, music and sound are employed throughout to carry the film forward on its triumphant flight.

It would be mere foolishness, however, to pretend that *Le Million* contains no faults. On the contrary, there is one device in the picture which in my opinion deserves the strictest censure. This is the monotonous appearance at intervals throughout the film of two ostensibly English characters, who sit on the roof of Michel's and Prosper's studio and are supposed to be watching the film as the audience sees it. They accompany their absurd behaviour with an equally fatuous running commentary, explaining with laboured boredom precisely what is obvious to any moderately intelligent person on the screen. As a device for securing international appeal the idea is crude, for the film has already achieved this by its direction, and it will be apparent that this spasmodic punctuation is not only unconvincing but does its best to destroy an otherwise excellent continuity.

While I fully appreciate the motives underlying the trick of hanging a thin veil of gauze between the players and the background, so as to bring the former into relief and thus heighten the fantastic quality of the film, I do not particularly care for the effect. Admittedly, the unreal atmosphere created in this way is in accord with the general feeling of the whole, but at the same time it gives the sets an appearance reminiscent of painted backcloths which is far from pleasing. Moreover, the acting itself, if such it is to be called, is not above reproach, but this is perhaps a fault of minor importance under such cleverness of direction.

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It is not without significance that the work of René Clair is best appreciated outside its country of origin, especially in all parts of Germany, because his satire of human weaknesses penetrates too deeply into the sensitive mind of the French bourgeois. I think I am correct in stating that neither *Sous les toits de Paris* nor *Le Million* received such a rapturous ovation in France as that accorded them in other cities of Europe, England and America. The fact that Clair is unable to resist satirizing the traditions and conventions of his country has more than once brought him into disfavour. I know of no other director in the cinema who can so skilfully employ the technical devices of the medium to ridicule time-honoured customs and the pomp of officialdom. The propaganda of the Soviet films, always crude and too caricaturish to be effective with intelligent minds, is like a sledge-hammer when compared with the rapier play of Clair's delicate wit. Nor is he content with making fun of the foibles of everyday life, but in *Le Million* magnificently burlesques Lubitsch's *The Love Parade* in the scene of Vanda's bedroom with its great hanging draperies and suspended cupid.

When Clair had completed *The Italian Straw Hat* in 1927, Albatross-Sequana retained him on contract for a year, though he directed no further picture during that time. So biting was the undercurrent of satire in that brilliant comedy (still in my opinion his best piece of work), so deeply did the thrusts penetrate into the hearts of French provincial audiences, that Clair was forced to remain idle until the rancour against him had subsided.

In the same way, I fancy the true Parisian resented the picture of night-life in *Sous les toits de Paris*, for although the film was wholeheartedly French in texture, it presented more of a showman's idea of Parisian night-life than was agreeable to the ordinary Parisian. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the French dislike their beloved city being represented on the screen as an underworld of apaches and dancing-dens, and that when one of their best directors puts all his ability into such a film they are righteously annoyed. Feyder's sparkling political satire, *Les Nouveaux Messieurs*, it will be remembered, was for some months forbidden by the French censor, simply because it revealed all too plainly the childishness of political systems. In these circumstances I do not find it surprising that the French regard Clair's sound films with an attitude bordering on indifference, although they are secretly delighted that this young director has achieved fame in practically every capital.

As is now well-known, Clair was a journalist on " L'Intransigeant " when he became mildly interested in film acting. Later, he was able to become an assistant to Baroncelli, the veteran French director, and then—like so many other young men—he started to make short experimental films. *Paris qui dort* (*The Crazy Ray*), *Le Fantôme du Moulin Rouge*, *Le Tour* and *Le Voyage Imaginaire*, each of these was a splendid training ground for discovering the thousand and one uses of the camera and the vital importance of screen movement. He set up an idol for himself in Chaplin, studying in detail every aspect of the great comedian's work, and learned also from the speed of the Mack Sennett comedies. Slapstick in a more refined edition than that of the American comedies has played a principal part in all Clair's films. In 1925, he realized that to make films on a proper scale a considerable amount of money is needed, and consequently he accepted a contract from Albatross-Sequana, producing for them *Le Proie du Vent* (released in England as *Prey of the Wind*), not especially interesting but nevertheless a step forward into production on a full-size basis. Two years later he made *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie* (*The Italian Straw Hat*), followed in turn by *Les Deux Timides* (*Two Timid Souls*), *Sous les toits de Paris* and *Le Million*, the last two for the newly formed Films Sonores Tobis.

Throughout this series of films, Clair's wit and intimate sense of humour have developed with gradual intensity up till *The Italian Straw Hat*, which I believe to be a full expression of his subtle ability. In *Sous les toits de Paris* and *Le Million* he has added sound to his battery of technical attributes and again exploited his love of slapstick, satire and fantasy. This latter quality is as inherent in Clair's direction as his satire, and is brought out by a parade of camera devices which are the result of early training. Probably there is more slapstick in *Le Million* than in any of his other work, just as *Le Voyage Imaginaire* was outstanding for its fantasy and *Sous les toits de Paris* for its charm.

His use of the chase, basis of all American slapstick, is predominant in *Le Million.* Not only is the whole picture one long chase after the missing lottery ticket, but other chases—such as that by the detectives—are introduced to keep the action moving. Passages and corridors are the excuses for chases, and thus we have a surfeit of them—in the block of studios and at the back of the stage in the Opéra, passages which cross and bisect each other like the railway lines at Clapham Junction. It is remarkable what humour Clair can extract from his passages.

Instances of his mordant wit are too numerous to set down in full, but mention should be made of the two ladies employed by Signor Sopranelli to be present at the Opéra every night so as to be able to throw the same bouquet on to the stage. This small incident is as memorable as the muddle of the clocks in *The Italian Straw Hat* and the frightening of the American tourists in *Sous les toits de Paris*.

Although Clair is a director who works entirely through his camera, as we may remember from the photographic trickery of the court scene in *Les Deux Timides* and the moving camerawork in *Sous les toits de Paris*, it is obvious that he does not give overmuch thought to his actual camera set-ups. He certainly does not employ the angle of camera vision to express particular moods, as does Pabst in *Die Dreigroschenoper*. With the exception of the travelling camerawork, it seems as if the set-ups in *Le Million* are the result of careless abandon. I cannot recall one shot of the film which in itself was beautifully composed, a fact that adds weight to Clair's cinematic instinct. Yet he makes a point of employing every camera device peculiar to the cinema in order to express his humour.

Taken as a whole, Clair's direction is essentially personal, utterly the work of a single mind, combining satire and slapstick with occasional flashes of sentiment. He is more interested in classes of people than in individuals, possibly because the group lends itself more to satire of conventions than the individual. Each of his films has been concerned with a number of persons and their acquaintances, never with the character of one in particular.

I would mention, also, his favourite idea of running one character through a film until by sheer repetition he or she begins to be humorous. This is an old trick, often used by Chaplin and other comedians. *The Italian Straw Hat* centred round a deaf old man who was really of little consequence. *Sous les toits de Paris* contained its irate gentleman with his feet in a bath, who was constantly about to throw a jug of water over Albert but was never quite able to bring himself to do so. It had also its delightful old man in the café at the end, completely bewildered by the extraordinary behaviour of Louis and Albert. *Le Million,* in its turn, has a taxi-driver who carries Michel all round Paris without receiving his fare and continually gets moved on by the police, as well as a sun-bather. Such small characters, played with perfect artistry, are typical of the importance attached by Clair to his minor players. It may be pointed out that they are always doing things, ever in a state of achieving some small action but never quite succeeding, thus forming yet another undercurrent of movement to contribute to the pace of the film as a whole.

I have already commented on the use of music in *Le Million,* but I would stress Clair's very remarkable sense of musical motifs, his feeling for overtones of sound, which run the whole way through the picture. It is possible that if we were to see *The Italian Straw*

Hat again, we should find plentiful evidence of this musical strain which we did not observe three or four years back.

That these two sound films by Clair assume an important place in the development of the sound cinema goes without question, but at the same time there is a danger to overestimate their achievement. Both *Sous les toits de Paris* and *Le Million* are very competent pieces of artistry, the work of a mind skilled in cinematic resources, and succeed in being extremely entertaining. Yet they are only two of the wave of film-operettas which have been produced since Europe attacked the problems of the sound cinema, and as yet we have not seen in England the films of other directors who are working along the same lines. When Thiele's *Le Bal* and *Drei von der Tankstelle* (*Chemin du Paradis*) and Bolvary's *Zwei Herzen im* $\frac{3}{4}$ – *Takt*, all examples of the film-operetta, have been generally exhibited in England, we shall be better qualified to give Clair his true place in the sound cinema. I repeat that it is likely we shall one day rediscover the brilliance of Clair at its best in *The Italian Straw Hat.*

TRADER HORN

Directed by W. S. Van Dyke

(Produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Culver City, California, U.S.A., 1929-31)

Perhaps the safest recipe for a really successful box-office film is to take the old, old romance of the boy and the girl and set it against a background of real material. It follows, also, that the stranger and more sensational the environment, the more attractive the picture is likely to be with the multitude. Pseudo-epic films of great achievements stand out along the course of the cinema's development like telegraph poles along a railway. Occasionally interesting but more often sickening, they are yet beloved by the masses because the romantic human-interest is combined with hideous perils, and bewailed by the intelligent because the natural camera material is smirched by a conventional and banal story. But to a certain extent we must be thankful for what little real material we are allowed to see on the screen, for at least ninety per cent. of the ordinary movies is composed of artificially built sets in which artificially made-up actors and actresses disport themselves. For the moment, I deplore the love-interest which is introduced into open-air pictures, but at the same time I am grateful for what small relief they offer from the faked settings of the Elstree and Hollywood studios.

The wide appeal of the love story-cum-*plein air* film was probably initiated by the success of James Cruze's *The Covered Wagon* in 1923. This, as John Grierson has pointed out, was begun as a common Western, but finished as a new type of picture. It was different from what had gone before because it was taken against a real background. The great trek was made by real people over real desert and real rivers. The film was an attempt at a faithful reconstruction of a past event. It showed real people doing real things in real surroundings. It brought reality to the screen instead of mock-realism.

Always quick to benefit by example, America gave a good deal of thought to this idea of combining a box-office story with natural material, with the result that there duly appeared further successes constructed on this apparently sure-fire formula, such as *Down to the Sea in Ships, Wings, The Four Feathers,* and *White Shadows in the South Seas.* On the other hand, there are occasions when the recipe has been pushed to extreme lengths, as in the recently made *The Big Trail,* which attempted to incorporate every box-office quality perceptible in *The Covered Wagon,* magnified to a hundredth degree of showmanship, with the speech and sound effects rendered possible by present-day recording.

Much the same sort of thing was responsible for Paramount's oddity *The Four Feathers,* which was a patchwork of good animal shots obtained by Ernest Schoedsack and Meriam Cooper in the Sudan and a studio-made version of Mason's novel by Lothar Mendes. Unwilling to risk the success of the appeal of animals alone, Paramount considered the blending of this good material with a ridiculous mock-heroic story a necessity if the film was to make money. It is difficult to produce evidence of the short-sightedness of this policy, for so few films dealing with actual material in a proper manner have been rendered available to the general public. Flaherty's *Moana* and Grierson's *Drifters* are, of course, two outstanding examples.

But even such conspicuous attempts to kill two birds with one stone as *White Shadows in the South Seas* and *The Big Trail* pale into insignificance with the arrival of the much-heralded *Trader Horn.* Despite its many faults and irritating lapses into false sublimity, this is nevertheless a film of exceptional interest, serving admirably to illustrate both good and bad principles of cinematography. Whatever else it may be, it is at least different from the superficial polish and artificiality of the customary American movie of the domesticated type, and for that one redeeming feature I am more than thankful.

Before proceeding to investigate the merits and demerits of *Trader Horn*, there are points to be raised which concern the decision of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to make a screen version of the adventures of Aloysius Horn, and moreover, the reason why they sent a production-unit to Africa when for their purpose the picture could probably have been made equally well at Culver City, California, or thereabouts. For although they expended very considerable sums of money on transporting sound trucks, lights and generators as well as an army of technicians to Africa, the executives of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer were obviously going to take no chances on the success of *Trader Horn*. They had too much picture-sense, for instance, to believe that the mere sight of African scenery, natives and animals would be of sufficient interest to the public without a good popular love story, such as those which made *The Pagan* and *White Shadows in the South Seas* " colossal box-office smashers." If the heart of darkest Africa was to be brought to the screen at all, it must be properly harnessed and employed as a box-office magnet.

On the other hand, there is much in this film that is lovely, because it is impossible to take cameras to such a country as Africa and not to photograph beautiful material. The natural function of the camera cannot be suppressed. There are many glorious shots in *Trader Horn* : great fantastic clinging trees, deep roaring rivers, magnificent sweeps of sky splotched with billowing cumulus clouds—so lovely when photographed through filters and on panchromatic stock that I have heard the opinion expressed that all sense of reality is missing, and that at times the photography of *Trader Horn* creates a world of its own.

In passing, I would call attention to the paradox that beautiful photography can be a definite menace to a picture. So much does a film's power of expression rely on the movement and space relating image to image, that isolated shots, predominating because of their photographic value, tend to destroy the smoothness of that vital relationship. Several instances occur when the images on the screen have been so stimulating pictorially that they have formed a barrier between the audience and the cinematic value (and hence the dramatic content) of the shot in question. Karl Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* is a standard example of this misfortune, whilst other films that have suffered a similar fate are Eisenstein's *The General Line*, Walter Creighton's *Southern April*, and E. A. Dupont's *Cape Forlorn*. I believe, also, that some of the material taken for Grierson's forthcoming *Port of London* was almost too lovely to be used, and I recall one shot of an Atlantic liner in dock in Harry d'Arrast's *Laughter* which was so perfect in composition and lighting that it stood aloof from its surrounding sequence, thereby causing disharmony.

To return to the acute picture-sense of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer executive—they were not even satisfied to rely on the thrills obtained by Van Dyke and his cameramen in Africa. They decided that a little double-printing would achieve a more sensational atmosphere than was actually present when the shots were taken. In one of the scenes with the crocodiles, for instance, we see Horn and Peru in the foreground paddling their canoe for all they are worth, whilst immediately at their back, only a few feet away, an enormous crocodile runs along the bank of the river. If the truth were known, this shot as seen on the screen is composed of two separate shots, the one of the crocodile taken in Africa (although I am given to understand that crocodiles of such size do not exist, and that this creature was probably a South American alligator transported to Hollywood) and the other shot of the trader and his gallant young friend certainly taken in a studio. But by a process of double-printing, we, the public, are lured into believing that the shot was strictly true in its thrill. I am not blaming Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for achieving a physiological thrill in this way—although I resent the trickery—but it was unfortunate that the photography of the two different shots was not matched up more carefully and the fake rendered a little more convincing.

Thus we arrive at some sort of an idea of the motives underlying the making of *Trader Horn*, and can estimate how much value may be placed on its claim to be an epic film of the Dark Continent and a landmark in the development of the cinema. In my opinion the chief value of *Trader Horn*, after making exception for some of its photography, lies in its revelation of the efficiency of the up-to-date laboratory mechanism of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, and of the advantages of the Dunning Process.

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Some years ago—1920 or thereabouts—a film was made in Africa of *King Solomon's Mines,* which, in spite of its imperfections of technique, came very near to achieving the spirit in which Sir Rider Haggard's famous novel was written. Although the story of *Trader Horn* purports to be adapted from the actual experiences of Aloysius Horn, it carries with it an appetite for adventure similar to that which distinguished the many African romances which Rider Haggard wrote round the delightful character of Allan Quatermain. It is not my intention to depreciate Aloysius Horn, but the narrative value of the film is singularly poor and sadly lacking in imagination, inasmuch that I fail to comprehend why, when they decided to exploit the Dark Continent as a box-office sensation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer did not select one of the admirable Quatermain romances. As I watched the film through on several occasions, a hundred Quatermain incidents came into my mind; over and over again I regretted that Van Dyke had spent so many months in Africa with every facility at his disposal and had achieved so little of real, powerful, dramatic quality. If, in the concern of the box-office, a film must have a romantic interest, why in heaven's name did not Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer choose one of the many splendid stories available to them in preference to that of Aloysius Horn?

Tracing the narrative of *Trader Horn* as it stands, Horn, an experienced ivory trader, and Peru, a young, presumably rich friend of doubtful intelligence, set out together up a river to barter with the natives for ivory in return for copper-wire and salt. Almost at once a thrill is introduced as they hear the drum-taps through the forest, summoning the natives to perform their juju rites. Scared away from their first landing-place, the two men continue up the river, which is infested by all the crocodiles in Africa, until they find safe camping ground. In the middle of the night they are awakened by the *safari* of Edith Trend, a widowed missionary who travels up and down the country in search of her daughter Nina, who was stolen by the natives when still a child. Mrs. Trend, looking young and radiant, has just heard that a white girl, whom she supposes to be her daughter, is being held as a fetish by a particularly fierce and warlike tribe, the Isorgi, who are to be found above the Murchison Falls. Gallantly the Trader offers the wandering widow his escort, which she politely but firmly refuses; she agrees, however, to allow him to follow upon her trail. A few days later they discover her dead body floating at the foot of the falls, " which no white man has ever seen before."

In accordance with their plan, Horn and Peru, with their *safari* headed by the giant negro gunbearer Renchero, push on into the country of the Isorgi, passing on the way through a veritable Zoological Gardens of wild beasts. Having shot an odd rhinoceros or two, and given us to understand by now that young Peru is the quintessence of fatuosity, the adventurers are suddenly surrounded by hordes of shrieking Isorgi. They are taken before the chief, and Trader Horn attempts to win his good favour by means of a musical-box. This leaves the Isorgi mentally cold, and the white men and Renchero are thrown into a grass hut. To their surprise (and this is the main high-spot of the picture) they are paid a visit by the white " goddess," the fetish of the tribe, who stands before them in all a woman's glory. Peru, brave lad, thinking that she can be induced to save fellow white people, lays a hand on her, but she, stung to the quick or core, lashes him across the face with her whip not once but several times, so that the censor can have no hesitation in granting a universal certificate. At that moment a juju is begun and Horn, Peru and Renchero are dragged to the torture stakes. All at once the goddess is seized with a fit of remorse (we suspect Peru's side-whiskers have had their effect) and after a prolonged battle of wits with our old African villain, the medicine-man, she leads the heroes away.

Dodging hippos on all sides, they paddle in a canoe across the neighbouring lake and set out on a desperate trek through the virgin forest—gunless, foodless, and thirsty. After a thousand adventures, including the killing of a lion in a justified but, at the same time, hideously brutal and unpleasant manner, the wild cries of the pursuing Isorgi are heard. Horn nobly sends the others ahead and goes off in the opposite direction to decoy the savages. But the faithful gunbearer, more reminiscent than ever of Umslopogaas, disobeys his master's orders and returns to Horn. Having successfully led the Isorgi astray, they escape by lying on a floating log in the river, but the unfortunate Renchero is pierced by a chance spear. Meanwhile Peru and the girl, in between their embraces, have continued through the forest and fallen in with a band of friendly pigmies, who conduct them safely to the nearest white settlement. Here Horn rejoins them, and, brushing a tear from his eye, sends them off to civilization and the drawing-rooms of New York happily united in love.

Admittedly this is a sadly imperfect record of the story. I have omitted much—such as the beautiful moments when love for Peru first dawns in Nina's eyes and the pathetic early-Elstree touch when Renchero's double-exposed image appears in the sky —but it will suffice to give some idea of the situations and characters for which Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer thought it necessary to send a production unit to Africa.

Passing over these banalities, there are many exciting moments in *Trader Horn* which deserve our attention. In the first place, the presentation of the credit titles—a portion of a film not often thought worthy of criticism and consequently nearly always done in shockingly bad taste—calls for special comment. This short sequence of titles mixing slowly into one another, with unusual black type superimposed on the background of a faded map and set against an underlying theme of drum-music, definitely establishes the right mood for the whole picture at the outset.

I lay particular emphasis on this question of main titles, because I believe that by the arrangement of titling and the mood of its accompanying music or sound effects, the audience can be coaxed into exactly whatever frame of mind is deemed necessary for the reception of the opening sequences. It resolves itself into the creation of an effect on the subconscious mind of the audience. The whole matter of titling and sound effects preceding a picture is as yet in an elementary stage, as anyone who has made a study of " trailers " will agree. Now that the inclusion of titles has been curtailed to the business of stating the name of a picture and to giving the necessary acknowledgments to the participants in the production, the opening assumes a different quality from the remainder of the film, demanding a different treatment from that part in which dialogue is employed. This is admirably illustrated in *The Blue Angel.* The first shot on the screen is of Ufa's famous trade-mark, which is followed by the mixing credit titles, until again the trade-mark appears. The whole self-contained sequence is accompanied by its own music, which concludes as the Ufa mark fades from the screen, leaving a silent pause before the film begins with the cackling of geese and the fade into the opening shot.

To continue with *Trader Horn*, the first shots of the picture itself are well selected: a sunset landscape with the sound of a twittering bird suggests vastness and loneliness, a bird flying and skimming over calm water, a plunging hippopotamus, a great crocodile grunting ominously, and at length a long shot up the river of a canoe, accompanied by the faint singing of the native paddlers; in fact, a solemn procession of shots which at once drags us into the atmosphere. But, alas, we proceed to a long duologue, totally unnecessary and tediously dull, between Horn and the boy Peru, irretrievably destroying that very atmosphere which has just been so well built up. I have insisted on detailing the arrangement of these shots because they typify the inconsistency of most American productions. Constantly we see a brilliant beginning quickly shattered by dialogue in an attempt to explain the story. *The Benson Murder Case*, *The Easiest Way*, and *Anna Christie* are all cases in point, where the attention of the audience has at once been gripped only for that hold to be relaxed as soon as explanatory

American *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer*

Trader Horn

dialogue begins. The mind of the American producer is strangely perverse in thus destroying its own achievements.

There are shots during the native dancing in *Trader Horn* that are wonderfully exciting: the rhythmic thud of bare feet and the savage cries are almost dramatic. The close proximity of big game and the striking head-dresses of the Isorgi are fascinating, giving us a new thrill and showing us something that we have not seen so well done in other African pictures. In brief, we are overwhelmed by this wealth of rich camera material, but we are dismayed that its full beauty is not brought out in terms of proper cinema and allowed to stand on its own merits.

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In films of this type, breath-taking in their bigness yet laughable in their absurdities, it is difficult to single out any one member of the production unit for either praise or blame. If the critical standards of cinema as an art were to be strictly adhered to, then the principal faults should lie with the director. But in the case of an American or British committee-made picture where so many divergent factors contribute to the production as a whole, blame may lie equally with the director, the editor, the scenarist or the production supervisor.

Whoever may be at fault, the truth is that little real editing exists in *Trader Horn* as it is being shown, for the very obvious reason that the material was not shot with a view to constructive assembling. To take a single example, none of the real awe evoked by such an intensely dramatic spectacle as the Murchison Falls is inspired by what is shown on the screen. In the first place Van Dyke, and in the second the editor, had not approached the taking and the editing of these marvellous falls from a cinematic point of view. To reassure ourselves of this, we have only to recall the treatment of rushing water by Victor Turin in *Turksib.* To have produced a really emotional result, Van Dyke should have shot this scene from at least a dozen dramatically chosen angles (allowing, of course, for the difficulties of the location) with a definite plan in his head as to the final assembly and order of these shots on the screen, much in the same way as Asquith and Barkas approached the landing scenes in *Tell England.* Our knowledge of the cinema persuades us that by working in this way, Van Dyke could have achieved as strong, if not stronger, reaction on the audience from the screen reconstruction of the falls, than if they had actually been there themselves. And think, for a moment, of the full force of that reaction if cinematically evoked in a full house at the London Empire! This persuasive illusion of reality is surely one of the fundamental duties of cinema.

But unfortunately Van Dyke is accustomed to working in the American style, which for effect relies almost entirely on the pictorial value of the material photographed and disregards any such important factors as constructive assembling in terms of rhythm, light values and shot-lengths. In fact, all the editing of *Trader Horn* amounts to is a clever patching together of some real African shots, some scenes taken in a Hollywood studio, and the result of some double-printing, in an attempt to make the picture on the screen as artificially thrilling as possible. This is not constructive editing nor will such piece-meal patching ever be really effective. As I have said earlier, it is a splendid test case for the efficiency of American laboratory mechanism. It is a pity they cannot do as well with their optical printer at Elstree.

To summarize, the direction of Van Dyke in this film means practically nothing, certainly no more than was evident from *The Pagan, White Shadows,* and from his earlier Westerns such as *Hearts and Spurs* and *Ranger of the Big Pines*; the editing reckoned as such means even less; and the photography, for the most part adequate, in places reaches a hard, academic brilliance.

There can be no denial that sound adds very greatly to the appeal of this film. Not that it is brought into play with any imagination or creative intent, but that simple straightforward recording increases the visual attraction of the African environment. It is thrilling to watch a rhinoceros racing along through the short grass, but it is obvious that if we can hear its padding hooves as well, then our seats have been well worth two-and-fourpence, even if the screen is so distorted that it would have brought a flush of pleasure to the cheeks of El Greco. Not having been to Africa, I do not know whether crocodiles make noises like they do in *Trader Horn*, but it sounds convincing. The curious rhythmic singing of the native warriors (calling for the rhythmic cutting which was not forthcoming) and the speeches of the black warlords prove beyond question that sound, in this case unintelligible speech, is superior to the dialogue employed for explanatory purposes. I have no doubt in my own mind that this film would be greatly improved by the elimination of all dialogue between Horn, Peru, Nina and Mrs. Trend. If, by so doing, there is no story remaining, then *Trader Horn* could not have been suitable for a film in the first place.

Of the players not a great deal need be said, for their work is overshadowed by the presence of the animals, the trees, the rivers and the clouds. I like the natural casualness of Harry Carey as Aloysius Horn. He is convincing in the rôle of one entirely familiar with the dangers and beauties of Africa because he makes no attempt to act. As a result of many years' experience of playing before the camera, Carey is able to behave as he would if the camera were absent. His gestures and expressions are commonplace and hence eminently suitable for screen purposes. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that Duncan Renaldo, practically a newcomer save for taking Esteban in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey,* is theatrical and amateurish as the nit-wit Peru. Admittedly, the part is that of a tenderfoot and a greenhorn and it is in his rôle to feign surprise at elephants and rhinoceroses, but all the same I find it hard to believe that such a brainless and completely imbecile young man as Peru can exist. And even if he does, why waste valuable screen space on him?

Whilst *Trader Horn* was being shown at the London Empire, a volume of abuse was raised in the Press against the presence of Edwina Booth as the White Goddess. In many respects I agree, especially in regard to the ridiculous manner in which she retains her spotless make-up and snow-white limbs in the face of the perils encountered. I agree, also, that her mannequin sidle is scarcely in sympathy with the behaviour of a girl bred and brought up among Isorgi. Yet, despite these incongruities, Edwina Booth in certain scenes has a queer magical intensity, a curious unreal quality that does much to offset the improbability of her part. At times during the juju dancing she reminds me of the madness of Catherine Hessling in *Charleston*, and I feel that the mood is right. Had she been given less encouragement to act and more to be natural, Miss Booth might have deserved our admiration.

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Thus, with all its bigness, after two and a half years of suspense, *Trader Horn* is both a disappointment and a success. It shows what America can do if she sets out to do it, and it shows what might be done if the right sort of mentalities had the money to do it. It proves once again that real material is popular with the multitude which makes these great films a business possibility, and it proves up to the hilt the contention that such material demands proper cinematic handling if it is to be really effective. And it establishes, once and for all, the fact that the cinema's first obligation to the mankind that has brought it into being is to present the facts and realities of this world assembled in such a manner that they entertain as well as instruct.

ESSAYS

THE REVIVAL OF NATURALISM

EMILE ZOLA AND THE CINEMA

THE birth and progress of the Naturalistic novel during the nineteenth century, and the fight pursued with inexhaustible energy by the exponents of Naturalism against the Romantic and Academic traditions are familiar facts with the student of literature. That the battleground of this struggle, with its far-reaching effects, should have been France is not unnatural. New ideas were at the same time revolutionizing painting and politics. And France has always been a country eminently suitable as an environment for intellectual campaigns.

In brief, the Naturalistic novel proceeded from Balzac (hide-bound in a defence of monarchy and authority, yet " observing from life ") to Gustave Flaubert, who laid the foundation stone of the new movement in the immortal, and at the time, immoral " Madame Bovary." But Flaubert turned his back on the realistic method, disdainful of his own accomplishment. It was for Emile Zola and his disciples to lift the stone of Naturalism and to fling it in the face of the world. And the missile has left its dent on the face of the cinema.

I have long wanted to probe the connection that lies between Zola and the cinema, to discover why so many of his novels have been found peculiarly suitable for the screen, and, above all, to investigate the bond, strong, and, I believe, of the greatest significance, that exists between the champion of Naturalism and the so-called Naturalistic directors of the Soviet left-wing cinema.

Apart from a long survey of his novels, each of which is of great length, demanding endless perseverance from a reader accustomed to-day to books of comparative brevity, investigation is now made easily possible by the recent publication of Matthew Josephson's " Zola and His Time."[1] Therein is made clear much that is of extreme value to the student of the cinema by a revelation and close analysis of Zola's methods of working. There will be found matter that both strengthens and explains the bond between the Naturalism of Zola and that of various contemporary film directors, between the scientific methods of technique that are common to both.

The foundation of Naturalism was Truth. The spring of Zola's attitude was an exact, truthful, unshrinking observation of nature and man. Inasmuch that without analysis, without method, without deliberate truth there could be no politics any more than literature possible at that time. In fact, no art, no social culture, no purity of living could exist without scientific method. According to Taine, perhaps the most distinguished thinker in France at the period, vice and virtue were (chemical) products like sugar and vitriol. Here, then, we may remember the constructivism of Pudovkin; the composition of filmic reality out of photographically-recorded natural material.

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[1] " Zola and his Time," by Matthew Josephson. (Victor Gollancz.)

Throughout his long series of Naturalistic novels, Zola governed his conception by the outlook of Hippolyte Taine. Convinced that man could not be separated from his *milieu*, that he leaves his imprint upon his exterior life, his house, his furniture, his affairs, his gestures, and that to express everything one must express this multitude of effects and assemble this multitude of causes, Zola ultimately held that a state of environment determines and completes the human being. Thus, when Gervaise, the laundress in " L'Assommoir," is happy, the street is gay and bright with sun; when she is despairing, the gutter-stream is black and filthy; when she is meditative, the water reflects the blue, the deep azure of the summer sky. The extreme significance of this emphasis of environment in filmic representation of mood on the screen is too obvious to need comment. There are a thousand instances of it in the films of the German middle-period. Further, note that the underlying motive of Flaubert's " Madame Bovary " was that of a given personality, conceived as a unit in a mass, pitted against its environment and the *milieu* into which it is born. Here we may recall the earlier films of Griffith, who placed his characters in their natural sympathetic environment; and Seaström, whose characters are pitted against their environment.

But Zola diverged from Taine's thesis in his selection of characters. For whereas the latter desired general types to be used in strict accord with the theory of environment, Zola showed a preference for the exceptional, the pathological specimen, believing it to be more worthy of the artist than the conventional human being. This is a belief that still largely exists. Compare, for example, the often erotic and neurotic characters that Pabst puts in his films, and reveals by a complex psycho-analytical method of filmic representation, with the raw material of Eisenstein's selection. But, on the other hand, Zola avoided in his arrangement of action the popular " chain of coincidences," and substituted a " natural succession of events," which for the purposes of the screen should arrive from the conflicting and sympathetic moods of the characters employed. Zola had always a passion for order, for logical development, for a chain of determined causes and effects—which, of course, should be the basis of all scenario continuity.

His rendering of man was purely physiological. It was never his aim to comment or moralize psychologically. He desired only to investigate, to expose, to lay everything that he saw in life before the reading public. He stated facts without bias or ulterior meaning. He was a propagandist only for his creed of Naturalism. He studied the behaviour of his characters rather than their mental conflict. He was one of the first novelists to present sex in its true dominating rôle; but he was concerned with its physical aspect alone. And here again is matter of interest for the film student. The film director is equally concerned with behaviour. In order to express the inward thoughts and emotions of his characters by their visually expressive external actions, he studies their behaviour. By psychological observation, the film director employs every gesture to reveal and build up the personality of his characters. This is common cinematic knowledge, especially to any student who has made a close study of the work of Georgi Pabst.

Zola penetrated every stratum of humanity. His novels are crowded with natural and unnatural types, each the product of their environment. Murderers, drunkards, saints, lechers, whores, bourgeois, soldiers, statesmen, shopkeepers, workers. Good, bad, stupid, imbecile, sensible, intelligent, malicious, angelic. Above all, he knew the lower-classes, the masses, the multitude, the proletariat. Gross, quarrelling, sweaty, sordid, honest, thrifty, bare-fisted, bestial, often unintelligent, and oppressed. Always oppressed. He had in his youth known poverty, hunger, squalor, depression, as indeed is usual with every true artist. We read of his attitude towards such living in " Le Ventre de Paris," where Lantier speaks of life as an eternal warfare between the Fat and the Thin. Always are the Fat the contented shopkeepers, the bourgeois, the pillars of society; the Thin are the oppressed, glowering with hunger, hatred or revolt, scheming for the downfall of their superiors. One recalls *New Babylon* and many another Soviet film. And Zola presented all this with such " unshrinking observation, truth and Naturalism " to call forth Ferdinand Brunetière's attack . . . " in his brutal style, his repulsive and ignoble preoccupations, he has gone further than all other realists. Is Humanity composed only of rascals, madmen and clowns?" To-day, we may refer to our daily newspaper and read almost any London film critic on Soviet films in general and the work of Pabst in particular. In point, the review of any film that deals with the essential facts of existence instead of artificiality.

Zola was aware that the only way to attack evil was with a hot iron . . . with truth. During the whole of his career he met with bitter antagonism. Every novel was received with columns of hostile criticism. Abuse of every conceivable kind was heaped upon him. Until, after the famous Dreyfus affair, in which he carried the pursuit of truth outside the covers of his novels into the ramifications of national affairs, he fled into exile. His literature was variously condemned as pornographic, obscene, bestial, brutal, evil, to which came his sole, unanswerable reply: "For me there are no obscene works: there are only poorly conceived and poorly executed ones. Our analyses can no longer be obscene from the moment that they become scientific and contribute a document. . . ."

A document? Is not that in the nature of a film?

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To the student of the cinema perhaps the most interesting characteristic of Zola was his astonishing feeling for mass-movement, for the conception of a universal scheme of actions and reactions. The movements and existence of his smaller figures are plaited into the mass-movement of the whole. Take "Germinal," where the theme was "individual suffering posed against, or accompanied by, the eternal injustice of the classes." Take all the minor characters, entangled and swept up in the great "cataclysm that symbolizes their lives," the Strike. To quote Mr. Josephson:

"'Germinal' is the poem of a strike. The whole central portion of the book deals with the assembling of the outraged miners in a forest at night, and their long procession consequently in a mob through one mining town after another, upon a career of vengeance and destruction. . . . All the moments in the life of this mob are stark and clear, from that in which the dying sun throws 'great lakes of blood' upon the flat plains behind them, and upon their distorted faces, to that dreadful pause and silence which precedes the firing by the military guards upon the bare-fisted men and women." Here again we can plainly see the influence of Zola on the Soviet cinema.

In a letter to Henry Céard, Zola comments on "Germinal": "The truth is that this novel is a great fresco. Each chapter, each compartment of the composition is so closely packed that everything seems foreshortened. . . . In this design I had thought that the large movements expressed a thought sufficiently, in imposing themselves upon the mass of the crowd. My subject was the action and reciprocal reaction of the individual and the crowd, one upon the other. . . ."

Writing three years ago on the descriptive power of Zola, I said: "He shows the big things with the little things taking place at one and the same moment, in a filmic manner. In 'La Débâcle,' that epic war novel, when I had read to the end of the part dealing with the Battle of Sédan, I said to myself, it is impossible, it is inconceivable to imagine anything written with more terrific feeling, more intensity, more strength of speech than this miserable disaster. But it is done cunningly by use of light and shade, by contrast of masses, by quiet and storm, until the climax comes with the burning of Paris and you are left with it ringing in your ears. I can remember no book that has aroused stronger emotions in me than 'La Débâcle.' They are brought about by a perfection of detail, by a subtle collection of small insignificant scenes, occupying possibly only the fraction of a second, but nevertheless of vital importance to the composition as a whole. The sticky tiles in the room of death in Weiss's house at Bazeilles; the broken gas-pipes that jetted fire in the streets of Paris; the smashed spectacles on Weiss's nose as the little man is shot against the wall of his house. Again, the crossing of the Meuse by night, the endless file of Cuirassiers emerging from the darkness of one bank and disappearing into that of the other; the neighing horses with their manes raised and their legs stiff with fright; the men erect in their stirrups, uniformly draped in their long white cloaks, their helmets blazing with fiery reflections, looking like phantom horsemen with flaming hair. Later, when Silvine and Prosper look for the body of Honoré, the corpse-strewn battlefield, the charge of the mad, riderless horses, neglected and hungry; the discovery of the laughing Zouaves, lying at ease on the sofa outside a house. Silvine mistakes them for living soldiers laughing their triumph. In reality, they are propped up on their knapsacks with death grins on their faces. And seven men kneeling in one line, with their rifles raised to their shoulders, shot dead whilst in the very act of firing. . . ."

Surely this is Zola, the master of film scenario description, of the selection of detail close ups for expressive purpose?

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Zola composed his novels strictly according to a set plan, in fact with such highly organized method that a comparison with the preparation of the film scenario is inevitable. Block by block, chapter by chapter, brick by brick, documenting and gathering material as he proceeded, Zola progressed from novel to novel in the building of the vast tower of the " Rougon-Macquart " series, twenty volumes in all. " The Rougon-Macquart, Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire."

Firstly, he would select his theme, soliloquize upon it, choose his central character from the genealogical tree of the Rougon-Macquart, proceed to his summary plan, then through succeeding stages of a detailed plan, environment, notes of other characters, for all of which he amassed a pile of documents. The whole of the preparatory work was elaborate and calculating. The final writing and assembling of the book Zola would call the " editing." " He goes at it calmly, methodically. He writes four manuscript pages every day, almost without crossing out a word," writes Paul Alexis. " There were three primary sources of information: books which related to the past; testimony, either through written books or direct conversation, by persons at hand or experts; and finally direct personal observation by himself on the field of action." For each novel he would surround himself with a "whole library on the subject treated; he would have competent persons to talk with him, whenever they could be approached; he would travel, see the horizons of his subject, its people, its morals." All these documents were classified in folios, pigeonholed and labelled with great care, awaiting the assembly or editing. Zola called this system of documenting the constitution of a portfolio. It has its counterpart to-day in the efficient scenario-bureaux of the Soviet film industry, and in First-National's library of "recorded sounds."

It is impossible to make a film, write a novel, paint a canvas, unless the artist has absorbed the subject, the material, the people, the objects, the dialogue, the architecture, the atmosphere and the environment. But how many film directors can truthfully say that they have done this for each film they have made? There is nothing in contemporary life (as well as in the storehouse of the past) which should not be of interest to the film director. But a point to be stressed is that Zola would always reject episodes or documents offered to him if they had no reason, and if their logic did not enhance and strengthen his purpose. An analogy may be found in Le Corbusier's maxim, "I shall find my clue in cold analysis. At each stage my duty will be to put the question: Why? Nothing has any right to exist which cannot give a precise answer." This selection of material, which is a matter of intellect, experience and observation, distinguishes the good film director from the bad. Genius lies in the application and employment of the selected material for the expression of the idea, of the creative impulse that brings the film into being. Zola refers to the business of documenting as simply the amusement of a mechanic directing the play of a thousand cog-wheels with meticulous care. How Zola would have enjoyed himself in a film studio! But we must for ever be able to distinguish between the mere recorded fact of documentary interest and the creative impulse which builds such material into a work of art.

The popularity that Zola's books enjoyed, despite the antipathy in which the man was held, is of some significance. All his novels sold in great numbers, creating records at that time in the publishing trade. " Nana " reached many thousands; " L'Assommoir " reached the hundred thousand mark in a few months. Zola was an astute showman. It was an age of learning, particularly among the lower-classes, and he believed rightly that great numbers of people enjoyed receiving information at a low cost about factories, department stores, the stock exchange, the army, etc. It is only logical that the demand for information to-day is even larger, but it is for the cinema, with its greater breadth and scope as well as its far-reaching influence, to meet that demand. By such pictures as *The General Line, Turksib, Drifters, Finis Terræ, Moana, The White Hell of Pitz Palu* and *Cimarron* it is doing so.

Thus it will be appreciated that there is much in modern cinema that was foreshadowed in the Naturalistic novel of Zola. Scientific method, the theory of environment, even scenario-organization and selection of detail is common to both mediums.

Never, however, in making comparisons and drawing parallels must we confuse the literary outlook of the one with the cinematic outlook of the other. The strongest link between the Naturalism of the past and the Naturalism of the present is their joint aim, their ultimate end—truth. Terms and labels are nothing. Zola, at the age of twenty, said to his friend Cézanne: " All art is one: spiritualist, realist are only words. . . ."

THE FILMS OF FRITZ LANG

SCARCELY any of us have not been thrilled in our youth by amazing and improbable stories of adventure and discovery. Times without number we became childishly excited following an unflagging hero to strange and unknown lands, our heart-beats treading in his footsteps as he met danger after danger with irrepressible courage. Page by page we cursed at his ill-luck because his secret plans were stolen, vowing horrible death to the leaders of the mysterious gang who continually foiled his projects. Then we breathed freely as he narrowly escaped from their clutches, only to plunge more deeply into some fresh adventure. Whilst all the time we longed to warn him of the sinister figure that lurked round the corner.

We have always been delighted by stories of astounding inventions, fantastically designed submarines, incredible flying ships, just as we have been fascinated by the countless catastrophes perpetrated by cunningly devised machines which control the universe by the pressing of a single button. A thousand such wonders are crammed into the marvellous pages of Jules Verne, Eugêne Sue, M. P. Shiel, H. G. Wells, Conan Doyle, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Herbert Strang, not to speak of the multitude of thrills contained in penny dreadfuls and shilling shockers.

Alas, such crazy flights of our fancy had perforce to remain dreams, incapable of taking actual form. The ingenious ideas of such entertaining writers were confined between the covers of our beloved books, expanding into realization only in the boundless but unsatisfying realms of our imagination. But in the course of time, as seemingly impossible things have happened all round us, we have stopped and wondered as one by one the wildest conceptions of our youth have assumed concrete shape in everyday life. Giant flying boats like the Dornier Do. X, enormous airships like the Graf Zeppelin, marvels of television, long-range howitzers, wireless, and innumerable other products of scientific and mechanical invention have become commonplaces. From his yacht in the Mediterranean Signor Marconi switches on the electric lights of Sydney in Australia. Conversations take place hourly between people in America and people in London. Racing seaplanes travel at over three hundred and fifty miles an hour. No longer do we receive any thrill in reading about these things. Instead we marvel at still more extraordinary ideas as they take form in the dark interior of the cinema.

I am surprised that the film is not more often used to present the extreme flights of imagination. The very nature of the medium suggests its unlimited possibilities. Yet little real advantage has so far been taken of the cinema's unique facility for the rendering of the fantastic.

Broadly speaking, nine films out of ten shown to the British public concern the facts and emotions of what are supposed to be everyday people. To a certain extent this is desirable, for the cinema should be a reflector of our daily habits and actions so long as it mirrors them truthfully. But it would be deplorable if we were condemned to see on the screen nothing but incidents governed by the logic of everyday life. We should be subjected to a perpetual stream of dreary failures in love, industry and politics, dotted here and there with a chance success. And anyway, Hollywood (which supplies ninety-five per cent. of the world's film output) has definitely proved that it knows little of the mechanics of the art of living, and that American producers and directors are mostly incapable of building out of celluloid those things which are either true or logical.

In the presentation of amazing inventions, adventurous undertakings and undreamed-of exploits, the cinema is performing functions proper unto itself. By means of the film's vast store of technical resources, things that are unreal and improbable can be made to take actual form before our eyes. Our minds may be constantly held in suspense between the knowledge that the incidents which we are seeing are in reality impossible and the veritable fact that there they are upon the screen.

Far back in the early days of cinema in 1897, Georges Méliès contrived all sorts of short magical pictures of conjuring tricks and similar deceptions at the Théâtre Robert Houdin in Paris. Far from pursuing the more ordinary experiments with the new invention, such as straightforward records of people arriving at railway stations and boxing matches, Méliès exploited the magical properties of the cinema by making fantastic films like *A Trip to the Moon.* But as the industry developed, this ability of the camera to distort and double-expose became lost in the eager pursuit of the more obvious. Occasionally tricks were employed to create sensations when a story might flag a little, but the production of fantastic films as a definite aim did not receive much encouragement.

In fact, almost the only director who has attempted to use the cinema for achieving such remarkable effects is Fritz Lang, who has worked in Germany exclusively for the Decla-Bioskop Company, which later became incorporated with Ufa. He has to his credit eight extremely interesting productions, each of which has been more fascinating than the last. From the opening of his film career, Lang has consistently associated himself with the flower of the technical accomplishment of German studios, and this policy has played a large part in his success. In the realization of his pictures he has always selected the most skilled cameramen, the most creative architects, and the most attractive personalities to play his characters, whilst his scenarios have been adapted from stories by his wife, Thea Von Harbou, a well-known writer of sensational thrillers. With the production of each of his films, I have never failed to marvel at Lang's choice of theme, his flair for things on a big scale, and his remarkable fondness for ideas that, on account of their compelling imaginative qualities, are universal in their appeal.

From a filmic point of view his work has developed in two separate directions, with the result that his earlier pictures fall into two distinct classes. On the one hand both *Destiny* (1921) and the two parts of the *Nibelungen Saga* (1923) (*Siegfried* and *Kriemhild's Revenge*) were romantic, semi-historical, mystical films distinguished by slow, pageant-like processions of beautiful pictorial compositions trailing across the screen. They were long, heavy-handed, dark in material, full of trick camerawork and dignified studio architecture. On the other hand, *Doctor Mabuse, the Gambler* (1922), and *The Spy* (1928) were quick moving melodramas, mixtures of Edgar Wallace and Maurice Leblanc, thrilling in action, electric with startling mysteries, filled with secret police, gunmen, vendettas, complex disguises, railway smashes and bombs. *Metropolis* (1926), a vision of the future, combined the hugeness of *Siegfried* and *Destiny* with a modernism of outlook, but in spite of its colossal scale and courageous conception it was not a proper outlet for Lang's creativeness. In his two most recent films, *The Spy* and *The Woman in the Moon*, however, the best of each of his tendencies have been amalgamated into one definite style of picture.[1]

All these films were crammed with a quality that is best described as Langishness. They have evidenced a striving to express an essentially modern state of mind. With his gift for selection of material, Lang attempts to incorporate in his films the panorama of new ideas and modern tendencies that he feels about him. Such typical products of the twentieth century as zeppelins, rocket-cars, racing aeroplanes and speed-boats make deep impressions on his mind. Not only this, but contemporary motifs in architecture, with their panoply of parallelograms, geometrical designs, steel structures and reinforced concrete surfaces, together with the continual cry of " new materials demand new forms " play an important part in his settings. Modern painting, experimental cubism, expressionism and surrealism are given their accredited value. *Metropolis,* alone, can be cited as an example of Lang's feeling for architectural form, and *Doctor Mabuse, the Gambler,* was far ahead of its time in *décor.* Moreover, it is evident that Lang takes the trouble to understand these things before he uses them. He is most definitely not to be confused with the showmen of Hollywood, who exist on the quick assimilation of new fashions and employ modernism for slick effect (e.g., the *décor* of most American society movies, such as *The Kiss, The Easiest Way, The Single Standard* and their British imitations like *Potiphar's Wife*). On the contrary, Fritz Lang has a well-formed sincerity of purpose which renders his films, despite their faults, contributions to the good progress of the cinema as a whole.

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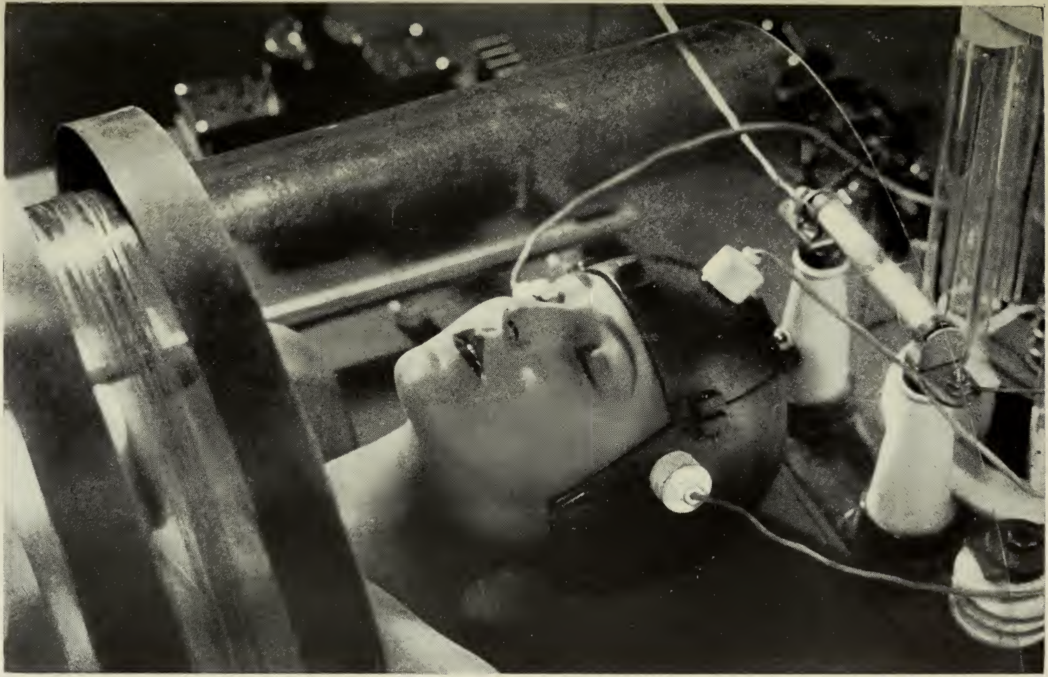
[1] From reports, I gather that his recently completed sound film, "*M*," follows on the style set by *The Spy* and *Dr. Mabuse*, being based on the notorious Düsseldorf murders.

Here again I would stress the importance of realizing that these productions were enveloped by an environment of studio structures. They were for the most part entirely conceived, constructed and produced within the confines of the film studio, a method of production that distinguishes such works with unmistakable qualities. This preference for pure



German *Ufa*

METROPOLIS

studio constructivism which is peculiar to the German cinema and is noticeable in almost all its products from 1919 until the present year, may be traced as being the natural outcome of the national ability for good craftsmanship. It is apparent equally in the perfection of camerawork and lighting effects, and in the general high standard of German film architecture. All the Fritz Lang films are admirable examples of this particular school of contemporary cinematography.

Into the production of *The Spy*, therefore, we perceive that Lang put the best of his two tendencies, with the result that it was a rare instance of a good mystery film handled with intelligence. We had a skilfully contrived combination of rapid actional interest, complex disguises, plots and counter-plots, developed at double speed, together with modern settings, efficient camerawork and attractive personalities. In sum total, an excellent, highly entertaining film realized with a consummate degree of technical accomplishment but not wholly cinematic in treatment. It is this *uncinematic* quality in Fritz Lang that I wish to emphasize later.

We arrive, then, at the most recent Lang picture, more Langish than ever, which was in the course of production when mechanically-recorded speech was introduced into the cinema. *The Woman in the Moon* is a direct development from *The Spy,* deriving equally from the mysticism of *Siegfried* and *Destiny,* from the architectural motifs of *Metropolis,* and from the melodrama of *Doctor Mabuse, the Gambler*. As is to be expected from Lang, the story-matter is of general topical interest, concerning the flight from the earth to the moon of a gigantic rocket, carrying within it a crew of human beings. Around this amusing idea is woven an atmosphere of thrills, with a startling opening and plenty of opportunity for spectacle.

The story concerns a professor who has a theory that there is gold in plenty on the moon's crust, and the sinister agent of a secret council of business men who are in turn determined that the gold (if any) shall be used for commercial purposes. Further, there is a triangular love interest interwoven between the young millionaire and inventor of the rocket, his right-hand man and mechanic, and the latter's fiancée, with whom the young millionaire is also in love. Eventually, after a series of whirlwind incidents involving stolen plans and attempts to destroy the rocket, the voyage is started and the projectile buries itself without undue mishap in the surface of the moon. But at once conflict breaks out amongst the crew and the film continues with further complications to reach a rather unsatisfactory conclusion.

With the exception, perhaps, of the ending, the material is adequate for the making of a good film and its presentation is truly wonderful. The elaborate staging of the rocket's departure, the surging of the crowds at the hangar, the scenes inside the projectile during the journey, the extraordinary glare of the lunar landscape, these are achieved with a conviction and reality that are possible only in a German film studio. All the intricate mechanical apparatus in the rocket, for example, is magnificently solid and real. Wheels, dials, twisted pipes, cylinders, steel ladders, and a hundred other details are obviously the result of clever craftsmanship. They may be impossible but they have the appearance of reality, and that is what matters. The surface of the moon, covered with a white powdered dust against a background of distant rocky mountains, is an amazing feat of studio construction. So also are the queer bubbling pools of oily liquid and the great lumps of gold in the twisted clefts of the rocks. I know of no other artists who can stage such things with so great a degree of sincerity and rightness as the Germans.

Similarly, Fritz Lang's selection of characters is completely successful.[1] Such types as Gerda Maurus as the woman, Willy Fritsch as the young millionaire, Fritz Rasp as the villainous agent, Gustav von Wangenheim as the mechanic, and Klas Pohl as the delightful professor, were to me all completely satisfying. Each played with charm, deliberation, restraint, naturalness and intensity as the changing situations demanded.

Thus all the material out of which this film was to be constructed had been selected and prepared so as to be beyond criticism. And as far as this material extends *The Woman in the Moon* meets with my entire approval. At times Lang even becomes intimate with his characters, an unusual quality in his direction, and we have small incidents of sheer joy such as Gerda Maurus finding her engagement ring too large, the small boy sliding down the balusters, and the very clever scene of the little pop-eyed man with the telephone. Moreover, Lang's characteristic inventiveness of detail is apparent in such minor touches as the rolling bowler hat and the snipping of the flower-heads during the young millionaire's telephone conversation. In fact, the whole fabric out of which this film is woven is worthy of our admiration.

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[1] On the score of the selection of good types Fritz Lang is above reproach. As well as employing the most attractive players of the established German school, he has brought to the screen such interesting personalities as Brigitte Helm, Gerda Maurus, Gustav Frölich, Lien Deyers and Klas Pohl.

But Lang's actual rendering of this splendid material is quite uncinematic in texture. As we see these remarkably well-constructed incidents on the screen, we are aware that there is something disappointing about them. We do not experience that prickling feeling so indicative of thrilling emotions that we should experience.

Despite my profound respect for Lang's exceptionally brilliant faculties, I force myself to admit that his outlook fails to embrace the proper ideas of cinematic representation. From long experience, we are aware that such material as this, such well-contrived situations and such architectural features, are emotionally exciting in themselves. But at the same time we also know that it is not enough for the screen material (the settings, the characters, the grouping and the incidents) to be faultless, for that is only the duty of a competent *métteur-en-scène*. These things are only the foundation. They are to be employed cinematically, and that is the obligation of a film director. Good as the material in *The Woman in the Moon* may be, the fact remains that according to the principles of cinematography, we demand that this material be presented to us in a cinematic manner, so that our excitement may be doubled and even quadrupled by proper methods of film construction.

In other words, Fritz Lang hardly seems to possess all the necessary knowledge of editing, of exact timing of shots, of precise discrimination of camera positions, and of the other principles of film construction which distinguish a cinematic mind from one that largely thinks in terms of beautiful pictorial compositions, " acting," and well conceived sets.

What I regret most about Lang is that he does not appreciate the supreme importance of the assemblage of shots on the screen. In each of his succeeding films, he shows the audience in one single shot a scene which might with advantage have been broken up into at least half-a-dozen shorter pieces. The simple act of photographing the movements and facial expressions of several persons in a set and placing the result on the screen is inadequate for the purposes of the cinema. Such simple and direct methods do not constitute the complex art and science of cinematography.

If this gifted *métteur-en-scène* appreciated to a greater extent the irrefutable fact that constructive methods of assemblage, as discovered and developed by the Soviet cinematographers, are the best means whereby true cinematic effect can be achieved, then his remarkable ideas and fascinating conceptions, so wonderfully suited to the medium, would assume unimaginable proportions of excitement. Treated on such a cinematic basis, *The Woman in the Moon*, with its splendid array of landscapes and situations, would have been an unprecedented achievement of its kind. Keyed up to the tension of tight steel wire by proper cinematic means, the idea and material of this film as staged by Lang would have held a stream of audiences spell-bound for many months. But as it is *The Woman in the Moon* shows no real advance since *Metropolis*, and that was almost five years ago, a long time in the history of the cinema.

In certain respects a showman, definitely a great *métteur-en-scène*, but only partially a film director, Fritz Lang is to be reckoned as a force in the world-cinema; his bigness of outlook compels our admiration. Happily he is only as yet half-way through his film career. There is still time for him to come to understand more fully the basic principles of cinematography and to employ them in an exposition of his vast conceptions. When this shall happen, I foresee films of unbelievable magnitude.

APPENDIX

THE PRODUCTION UNITS OF SOME OUTSTANDING FILMS, WITH THEIR PLAYERS

Although every attempt has been made to check the authenticity of the following data, no guarantee of absolute accuracy can be vouchsafed. The author would naturally be grateful for any additions. An asterisk (*) denotes that the film referred to has not, up till the time of writing, been shown for public exhibition in England.

All Quiet on the Western Front. (American) 1929-30

Production	Universal
Direction	Lewis Milestone
Scenario	Maxwell Anderson, Dell Andrews and George Abbott
Camera	Arthur Edeson
Design	Charles D. Hall and W. R. Schmidt
Score	David Broekman
Sound Recordist	C. Roy Hunter
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Louis Wolheim as *Katczinsky*, Lewis Ayres as *Paul Baumer*, and John Wray as *Himmelstross*. Adapted from the book by Erich Maria Remarque.

Anybody's Woman. (American) 1930

Production	Paramount
Direction	Dorothy Arzner
Scenario	Zoe Atkins and Doris Anderson
Camera	Charles Lang
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Ruth Chatterton, Paul Lukas and Clive Brook. Adapted from the book by Gouverneur Morris.

Big House, The. (American) 1930

Production	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Direction	George Hill
Scenario	Frances Marion
Camera	Harold Wenstrom
Design	Cedric Gibbons
Dialogue	Joe Farnham and Martin Flavin
Sound Recordist	Douglas Shearer
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Wallace Beery, Chester Morris and Lewis Stone.

Blaue Engel, Der. (German) 1929-30

Production	Ufa
Direction	Josef von Sternberg
Supervision	Erich Pommer
Scenario	Robert Liebmann and Karl Zuckmayer
Camera	Günthur Rittau and Hans Schneeberger
Design	Otto Hunte
Music	Friederich Holländer
Sound Recordist	Fritz Thiery
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Emil Jannings, Marlene Dietrich, Kurt Gerron, Rosa

Valletti and Hans Albers. Adapted from the book "Professor Unrath" by Heinrich Mann. Distributed in England by Wardour Films.

Cimarron. (American) 1930

Production	Radio Pictures
Direction	Wesley Ruggles
Scenario	Howard Estabrook
Camera	Edward Cronjager
Design	Max Ree
Sound Recordist	Clem Portman
Recording Apparatus	R.C.A. Photophone

With Richard Dix as *Yancey Cravat*, Irene Dunne as *Sabra Cravat*, Estelle Taylor as *Dixie Lee*, and William Collier junior, as *The Kid.* Adapted from the book by Edna Ferber.

City Lights. (American) 1928-31

Production	Charles Chaplin Film Corporation
Direction	Charles Chaplin
Scenario	Charles Chaplin
Camera	Henry Cronjager
Design	Charles D. Hall
Music	Charles Chaplin
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Charlie Chaplin, Virginia Cherrill and Harry Myers. Distributed in England by United Artists.

Drei von der Tankstelle, Der. (German) 1930

Production	Ufa
Direction	Wilhelm Thiele
Supervision	Erich Pommer
Scenario	Franz Schultz and Paul Frank

Camera	Franz Planer
Design	Otto Hunte
Music	Werner Heymann
Sound Editor	Herman Fritzsching
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Willy Fritsch as *Willy*, Oscar Karlweiss as *Kurt*, Heinz Ruehmann as *Hans*, Fritz Kampers as *Cossmann*, Olga Tschechowa as *Edith*, Lillian Harvey as *Lillian*, and Kurt Gerron as *Dr. Kalmus*. Distributed in England under title of *Chemin du Paradis* by Universal.

**Dreigroschenoper, Die.* (German) 1931

Production	Deutsche-First-National
Direction	G. W. Pabst
Scenario	Lania, Vajda, Balazs
Camera	Fritz Arno Wagner
Design	Andrei Andreiev
Music	Weill
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Rudolf Forster as *Mackie Messer*, Carola Neher as *Polly*, Fritz Rasp as *Peachum*, Valeska Gert as *Mrs. Peachum*, Lotte Lenja as *Jenny the Whore*, Vladimir Sokolov as *Schmidt the Gaoler*, Reinhold Schunzel as *Tiger Brown*, and Herman Thimig as the *Parson*. Adapted from the musical extravaganza by Brecht and Weill.

Earth. (Soviet) 1930

Production	Vufku-Kino
Direction	Alexander Dovjenko
Scenario	Alexander Dovjenko
Camera	Daniel Demutski

With S. Shkurat, S. Svashenko, P. Masokha, N. Nademski, V. Mikhailov and E. Maximova. Distributed in England by Atlas Film Co.

Front Page, The. (American) 1931

Production	Howard Hughes
Direction	Lewis Milestone
Camera	Glen MacWilliams and Bert Camm
Design	Richard Day
Film Editor	W. Duncan Mansfield
Sound Recordist	Frank Greenzbach
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Adolphe Menjou, Pat O'Brien, Mary Brian and Edward Everett Horton. Adapted from the play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Distributed in England by United Artists.

Hell's Heroes. (American) 1929

Production	Universal
Direction	William Wyler
Scenario	Tom Reed
Camera	George Robinson
Dialogue	Tom Reed
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Raymond Hatten, Charles Bickford and Fred Kohler. Adapted from the book " The Three Godfathers " by Peter B. Kyne.

Hocus-Pocus. (German) 1930

Production	Ufa
Direction	Gustav Uckicki
Scenario	Karl Hartl and Walther Reisch
Camera	Karl Hoffmann
Design	Walther Röhrig and Robert Herlth

Dialogue	Ben Levy
Sound Recordist	Dr. Goldbaum
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Lillian Harvey, Laurence Olivier, Athole Stewart, Felix Aylmer and Frederick Lloyd. Adapted from the play by Ben Levy. Distributed in England under the title of *A Temporary Widow* by Wardour Films.

King of Jazz, The. (American) 1930

Production	Universal
Direction	John Murray Anderson
Camera	Hal Mohr
Design	Herman Rosse
Sound Recordist	C. Roy Hunter
Music	Mabel Wayne, Milton Ager, Jack Yellen and George Gershwin
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Universal contract players and Paul Whiteman's band.

Laughter. (American) 1930

Production	Paramount
Direction	Harry D'Abbadie d'Arrast
Scenario	Harry D'Abbadie d'Arrast
Dialogue	Donald Ogden Stewart
Camera	George Folsey
Editor	Helene Turner
Sound Recordist	Ernest F. Zatorsky
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Nancy Carroll, Frederic March and Francis Morgan. Adapted from a story by Donald Ogden Stewart.

Love Parade, The. (American) 1929-30

Production	Paramount
Direction	Ernst Lubitsch
Scenario	Ernst Vajda and Guy Bolton
Camera	Victor Milner
Music	Victor Scherzinger
Sound Editor	Merrill White
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Maurice Chevalier, Jeannette MacDonald, Lupino Lane and Lillian Roth. Adapted from " The Prince Consort " by Leon Xanrof and Jules Chancel.

Million, Le. (French) 1930-31

Production	Films Sonores Tobis-Paris
Direction	René Clair
Scenario	René Clair
Assistant Direction	Georges Lacombe
Camera	G. Périnal and C. Raullet
Design	Lazare Meerson
Music	Armand Bernard, Philippe Parés and Georges Van Parys
Sound Editor	R. Le Haneff
Production Manager	Franck Clifford
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Annabella as *Beatrice*, René Lefébre as *Michel*, Louis Allibert as *Prosper*, and Vanda Greville as *Vanda*. Adapted from the play by G. Berr and M. Guillemaud. Distributed in England by Universal.

Monte Carlo. (American) 1930

Production	Paramount
Direction	Ernst Lubitsch
Scenario	Ernst Vajda

Dialogue	Vincent Lawrence
Camera	Victor Milner
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With Jack Buchanan, Jeannette MacDonald, Zasu Pitts and Claude MacAllister. Adapted from " The Blue Coast " by Hans Muellor and " Monsieur Beaucaire " by Booth Tarkington and Evelyn Sutherland.

**Mörder Dimitri Karazamov, Der.* (German) 1931

Production	Terra
Direction	Fedor Otzep
Camera	Fridl Behn-Grund
Sound Camera	Hans Birkhoffer
Design	Wilhelm Reichter
Music	Dr. Karol Rathaus
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Fritz Körtner, Anna Sten, Fritz Rasp, Bernhard Minetti and Max Pohl. From the book " The Brothers Karazamov " by Dostoievski.

Sous les toits de Paris. (French) 1929-30

Production	Films Sonores Tobis-Paris
Direction	René Clair
Scenario	René Clair
Camera	G. Périnal and C. Raullet
Design	Lazare Meerson
Music	Armand Bernard
Songs	R. Moretti and R. Razelles
Sound Editor	R. Le Haneff
Production Manager	Franck Clifford
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Pola Illéry as *Pola*, Albert Préjean as *Albert*, and Edmond Greville as *Louis*. Distributed in England by Wardour Films.

Street of Chance, The. (American) 1929

Production	Paramount
Direction	John Cromwell
Scenario	Howard Estabrook
Camera	Charles Lang
Dialogue	Lenore J. Coffee
Editor	Gerald Geraghty
Recording Apparatus	Western Electric

With William Powell, Kay Francis and Regis Toomey.

Stürm Über Mont Blanc. (German) 1930

Production	Aafa
Direction	Dr. Arnold Fanck
Scenario	Dr. Arnold Fanck
Camera	Hans Schneeberger, Richard Angst and Sepp Allgeier
Design	Leopold Blonder
Music	Paul Dessau
Film Editor	Dr. Elling
Shooting Supervisor	Karl Buchholz
Sound Recordists	Specht and Grimm Langer
Production Manager	H. R. Sokal

With Leni Riefenstahl, Sepp Rist and Ernst Udet. English version prepared by Mary Field and Victor Peers. Distributed in England under the title of *Avalanche* by Wardour Films.

Tell England. (British) 1930

Production	British Instructional Films Ltd.
Direction	Anthony Asquith and Geoffrey Barkas
Scenario	Anthony Asquith

Camera . . .	Jack Parker, Stanley Rodwell and James Rogers
Design . . .	Arthur Woods
Dialogue . . .	A. P. Herbert
Sound Editor . .	Victor Peers
Sound Recordist . .	Robert Birch
Recording Apparatus .	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Carl Harbord, Tony Bruce and Fay Compton. Adapted from the book by Ernest Raymond.

Trader Horn. (American) 1928-31

Production . .	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Direction . . .	W. S. Van Dyke
Scenario . . .	Dale van Every and John Thomas Neville
Camera . . .	Clyde de Vinna and Bob Roberts
Dialogue . . .	Cyril Hume
Sound Recordist . .	Douglas Shearer
Recording Apparatus .	Western Electric

With Harry Carey as *Aloysius Horn*, Edwina Booth as *Nina*, and Duncan Renaldo as *Peru*. Adapted from the books of Aloysius Horn.

Virginian, The. (American) 1929

Production . .	Paramount
Direction . . .	Victor Fleming
Scenario . . .	Howard Estabrook
Camera . . .	J. Roy Hunt
Dialogue . . .	Edward Paramore, Jun.
Recording Apparatus .	Western Electric

With Walter Huston, Gary Cooper, Richard Arlen and Mary Brian. Adapted from the book by Owen Wister.

**Westfront 1918.* (German) 1930

Production	Nero
Direction	G. W. Pabst
Scenario	Vajda
Camera	Fritz Arno Wagner and Charles Métain
Design	Ernö Metzner
Production Manager	Leo Meyer
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Fritz Kampers, Gustav Dissl, Claus Clausen and H. Mobis. Adapted from the book " Vier von der Infanterie " by Ernst Johannsen.

White Hell of Pitz Palu. (German) 1929

Production	Sokal
Direction	G. W. Pabst and Dr. Arnold Fanck
Scenario	Dr. Arnold Fanck and Lad Vayda
Camera	Hans Schneeberger, Richard Angst and Sepp Allgeier
Design	Ernö Metzner
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Gustav Dissl, Leni Riefenstahl and Ernst Peterson. Distributed in England by Universal.

**Zwei Herzen Im $\frac{3}{4}$ – Takt.* (German) 1930

Production	Superfilm
Direction	Geza von Bolvary
Scenario	W. Reisch and F. Schultz
Camera	Willi Goldberger
Design	Robert Neppach
Music	Robert Stolz
Recording Apparatus	Tobis-Klangfilm

With Walther Janssen, Gretl Theimer, Willi Forst and Irene Eisinger.

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